



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

### **Tower Hamlets Fostering Team**

**Family Placement Office  
62 Roman Road  
London  
E2 0QJ**

*Lead Inspector*  
Sharon Lewis

*Announced Inspection*  
6<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> 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

<b>Reader Information</b>	
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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](http://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](http://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** Tower Hamlets Fostering Team

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London  
E2 0QJ

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**Provider Web address**

**Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)** Tower Hamlets

**Name of registered manager (if applicable)** Hilary Bull

**Type of registration** Local Auth Fostering Service

**Category(ies) of registration, with number of places**

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

**Date of last inspection**      7th February 2005

## Brief Description of the Service:

The Fostering Service comprises of:

- Recruitment and Assessment Team
- Fostering Development Team.
- Kinship Care
- Access to Resources

The Recruitment and Assessment Team recruits, assesses and prepares prospective foster carers for approval. This team works with the marketing and publicity officer in identifying a recruitment strategy to meet the needs of children.

The Fostering Development Team aims to support foster carers through supervision. Support is provided through regular visits, weekly telephone calls, regular training sessions and support groups.

Kinship Care undertakes both roles of these teams when working with family and friends as carers.

The Access to Resources Team has a range of functions, which includes processing foster carers payments and liaising with the Fostering Development Team to match placements.

# **SUMMARY**

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

This Announced Inspection was undertaken over five days in February 2006. This is the agency's fourth inspection against the National Minimum Standards introduced from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2002. The overall objective of this Inspection is to ensure children are receiving the best possible care and their welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Tower Hamlets fostering service continues to exceed National Minimum Standards and evidenced the ability to consistently perform at an extremely high level. Fostering teams were unanimously committed to promoting innovative, child focused, creative practice and expressed the desire for perpetual excellence.

Four foster placements were visited. Questionnaires were received from two young people, five foster carers and six placing social workers. The majority of the feedback received was very positive. The fostering service was described as "excellent", "I feel they do a brilliant job" and was felt to provide "good consultation and training". Areas identified for further development has been highlighted as recommendations in this report.

Individual interviews were held with the Interim Head of Children's Services, the Service Manager and Fostering Team Managers and a Practice Manager. Individual discussions were also held with a selection of newly appointed staff, the Marketing Manager, Panel Chair, Human Resources Manager and the Access to Resources Finance & Information Manager.

Group and discussions were additionally held with Recruitment and Assessment, Fostering and Development and Kinship Care staff. A Foster Carer Support Group and part of a Fostering Panel were also observed.

Foster carers, children's, staff personnel, policies and procedures and a range of relevant documentation was examined. A tour of the premises was also undertaken.

The Inspector would like to thank all children, foster carers and staff members for their assistance with this Inspection.

## **What the service does well:**

Tower Hamlets is commended for the overall management of the fostering service. The Inspection evidenced that the fostering service is organised, managed and staffed in a manner that delivers the best possible childcare. All fostering teams have developed action plans linked to quality standards. There is consistent monitoring and development of the fostering service and a clear strategic vision linked to national priorities and objectives.

The fostering service has an efficient system of reporting notifiable incidents to the Commission for Social Care Inspection. Tower Hamlets is Beacon Council and has maintained its status of being a three star authority. The fostering service was commended at the National Awards for Local Government in 2005. The Council is currently shortlisted for the Children's Services Award for 2006.

The fostering service is commended for their support for foster carers. Monthly support groups are held and specific support groups are provided for Bangladeshi, Black African and Caribbean and short break carers four times a year.

The fostering service produces a quarterly newsletter, which is uniquely produced in English and Bengali. The newsletter highlights, training, legislative, staff and foster carer updates, activities, events and contact names and numbers.

The fostering service is commended for their commitment to staff and foster carer training. The fostering service provides a NVQ programme for foster carers and pre NVQ training which addresses English as a second language (ESOL), IT and study skills.

Staff had good morale, worked well as a team and at all levels felt individually valued. A mentor/buddying system is available for newly appointed staff. Social work staff are qualified and the majority have post-qualifying qualifications or are currently in completion.

The fostering service is commended for their ability to respond financially to children's individual needs. A bursary scheme is available to assist young people to pursue their hobbies and interests. The fostering service additionally funds educational and language support including computers.

The good practice developed within the Kinship Care team has received national recognition. The team was involved in the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) book 'Relative Benefits, Placing Children in Kinship Care.

The fostering service continues to be commended for its innovative recruitment strategy. The service is commended for their partnership working with the Asian community, outreach work with the Vietnamese community and their progressive targeting of the gay and lesbian communities. The fostering service website [www.fosteringandadoption.co.uk](http://www.fosteringandadoption.co.uk) enables applicants to register

their interest on-line. A freephone number is additionally available for enquires 0800 279 9850.

Tower Hamlets fostering service is commended for their system for promoting children's health and development. All foster carers have been issued with a comprehensive health advice and support manual. There is a dedicated team of Looked after Children nurses, a specialist sexual health worker and additional support from The Children Looked After Mental Health Service.

Placements were found to be nurturing and able to meet the specific physical, emotional, educational, mental and social needs of the children. The fostering service is commended for their commitment to meeting the diverse needs of children. Interpreting and translation services are incorporated and available in all aspects of the fostering service. Where transracial placements are made, the fostering service provides additional training, support and information.

Tower Hamlets is commended for its grow your own' workforce strategy. The large proportion of social workers and front line managers drawn from the local Bangladeshi and other black and minority ethnic communities evidenced the success of this strategy.

Tower Hamlets has invested heavily in and had developed an excellent service for young people leaving care. The Leaving Care Team has received a Charter Mark. The Continuing Care Scheme, operated in conjunction with the Leaving Care Service, makes provision for young people to remain with their carers beyond their 18<sup>th</sup> birthdays, where appropriate.

The fostering service is additionally commended for having an independently chaired Panel that is efficient, effective and culturally diverse.



## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

The fostering service is commended for translating the Children's Guide into Vietnamese to meet the needs of this sizeable group of young people. The fostering service is also commended for creatively producing needs led service through the introduction of specialist posts. A Vietnamese worker and Disability Worker have been appointed. The Kinship Care Team have also benefited from additional social work posts and greater representation of Bengali speaking workers.

Tower Hamlets Foster Carer Association has been re-established with assistance from an independent consultant. The Foster Carer Association has developed an action plan and is scheduled to hold their second AGM in March 2006.

The fostering service is commended for their use of information technology systems. In some teams compliance with maintaining the main SWIFT database has been 100%. The fostering service is commended for the implementation of a specific SWIFT system to meet the needs of the kinship care service. Introduction of the Electronic Social Care Record that aims to create a paperless office is in progress.

The fostering service is currently implementing a multi dimensional 'Treatment Foster Care Programme' to meet the needs of young people with complex needs or offending behaviour.

The Kinship Care team is commended for developing particular tools, which addresses the unique nature of kinship work. A kinship focused Form F assessment format has been developed.

The Tower Hamlets marketing brand has been updated to provide a fresher, look with greater use of colour and imagery. Colourful, well designed, easy to read recruitment packs have been produced in English, Bengali, Somalian and Vietnamese.

Formal meetings are now held between the Agency Decision Maker and Panel Chair, to discuss quality assurance and other issues, which promote and safeguard the welfare of children. The Panel Advisor additionally now provides Panel with a report of the statistics and activity within the service.

Foster carers are paid in line with independent agency rates. Foster carers reported that payments had improved since the introduction of the BACS system, which enabled payments to be paid into their respective bank accounts.

The fostering service is commended for their survey of prospective foster carers in reference to reasons for withdrawing from the assessment process.

### **What they could do better:**

This Inspection resulted in six recommendations being made. No legal requirements were issued. Tower Hamlets continues to provide an exceptionally high quality service. The below recommendations are made to further enhance areas of good practice.

The fostering service should consider more independent Panel membership. This should include someone with knowledge on disability issues.

Short break carers would benefit from a specialist Toy library.

A small budget should be available to facilitate the children who foster support group.

Additional staff support should be provided in Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team during recruitment campaigns to manage influx of enquiries.

The fostering service should ensure placements are supported by detailed contact agreements. Foster carers should also be updated on their travel allowances re: contact

The premises would benefit from the introduction of a loop system to further improve on communication provision.

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](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office.

# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

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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 at least once during a 12 month period.**

## JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

### 12

Tower Hamlets fostering service is commended for their system for promoting children's health and development.

## EVIDENCE:

### HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

All foster carers have been issued with a comprehensive health advice and support manual. Foster carers receive basic training on health, hygiene issues, first aid, with particular emphasis on health promotion and communicable diseases. Foster carer's additionally receive core training in child development.

Visits to foster carers confirmed that health needs of a child were routinely met. Health records were examined in the foster carer's homes. Files evidenced that children's health needs were addressed in the review process and as part of the supervisory visits.

There is a dedicated team of Looked after Children nurses and a specialist sexual health worker. Foster placements receive additional support from The Children Looked After Mental Health Service. A worker from this team has been seconded on a part-time basis into the fostering service.

# 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**

Tower Hamlets fostering service excels in providing well qualified staff and nurturing foster placements. Matching has improved and child protection enquiries are responded to appropriately. The independently chaired Panel is efficient, effective and culturally diverse.

## **EVIDENCE:**

### SUITABLE FOSTER CARERS

A total of four foster carers' homes were visited during this Inspection. Foster carers homes were found to be clean, comfortable, warm, adequately furnished and decorated. Children had age appropriate books, toys and equipment to promote educational and stimulating activity.

Placements were found to be nurturing and able to meet the specific physical, emotional, educational, mental and social needs of the children. It was noted that placements increased childrens confidence and young people commented on being "very happy," their "friendly home environment" and "very supportive" foster carer.

Foster carers understand that they may be interviewed or visited as part of the Commission's inspection process. All of the foster carers visited during the Inspection positively contributed to the process.

Tower Hamlets fostering service is commended for further developing their health and safety practices. Social workers have completed the necessary health and safety training. All files contained a comprehensive health and safety checklist and foster carers are additionally sent a copy of this checklist. Health and safety issues are checked at each supervisory visit. Foster carers receive first aid kits and appropriate first aid training.

## MATCHING

The fostering service has developed comprehensive matching procedures. The fostering service is commended for addressing the issues highlighted at the last Inspection. A recorded analysis now details how the proposed placement meets the child's individual needs. A matching checklist complements this information. The fostering service is currently working with other local authorities, to share foster carers in a bid to provide better matching.

Where transracial or transcommunity placements are made, the fostering service provides the foster family with additional training, support and information to enable the child to be provided with the best possible care and to develop a positive understanding of her/his heritage. An example was seen of this where interpreting services, were set up with Language Line. In addition to specialist training which addressed meeting the needs of Vietnamese children.

Foster carers are commended for making links with community groups, using their informal social networks and researching specialist books to assist them in the provision of transcultural care. Young people commented that foster carers were "well informed" and they enjoyed "sharing their culture".

## CHILD PROTECTION

Tower Hamlets fostering service is commended for their culturally specific child protection training. A range of training courses addresses child protection, including caring for a child who has been abused, safe caring skills, managing behaviour and recognising signs of abuse. The agency is commended for the additional course 'Men in Foster Care', which is designed to provide male carers with strategies for minimising the risk of allegation.

Allegations are dealt with in line with the London Child Protection Procedures. Allegations were responded to appropriately and evidenced good joint working across Childrens Services. Action taken included further addressing foster carers training and development needs and issues being brought to the Fostering Panel.

Management systems are in place to collate and evaluate information on the circumstances, number and outcome of all allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in foster care.

The fostering procedures section 3 focuses on 'A Safe and Positive Environment'. The foster carers handbook refers to bullying, the missing child policy and procedure. The fostering service evidenced that all significant events are reported to the relevant authorities. The fostering service has an efficient system of reporting to the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

## FOSTERING STAFF

Tower Hamlets has a corporate recruitment procedure, which provides clear written procedures for appointing staff, which follow good practice in safeguarding children and young people. Five personnel files were examined and evidenced that files were maintained in accordance with Schedule 1, The Fostering Services Regulation 2002. In addition disciplinary action was appropriately managed.

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets Human Resources Department is commended for being currently shortlisted in the National Awards for Local Government.

Tower Hamlets is commended for its 'grow your own' workforce strategy. The large proportion of social workers and front line managers drawn from the local Bangladeshi and other black and minority ethnic communities evidenced the success of this strategy. Three members of the fostering teams are currently being sponsored to undertake their social work qualification.

Tower Hamlets is additionally commended for their social work recruitment drive in India to meet the cultural needs of the community. The fostering service was seen to benefit directly from these recruitment policies.

Discussions with staff evidenced that social work staff had a good understanding of foster care and possessed the appropriate personal qualities, knowledge and skills.

## FOSTERING PANEL

Tower Hamlets Fostering Panel is properly constituted and comprises of relevantly qualified and experienced people. The Panel benefits from having an Independent Chair who has over twenty- one years experience in adoption and experience of chairing fostering and adoption panels in other organisations. The Panel Chair demonstrated the necessary, personal qualities and professional awareness to promote the needs of children.

Panel had a culturally diverse membership, with male representation. The Panel includes independent members, expertise in social care, child health, education and relevant personal experiences. The Panel has committed and effective legal and agency advisers. Senior management is commended for increasing the level of independent membership on the Fostering Panel.

Observation of the Panel and discussion with the Panel Chair evidenced that fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively. Pertinent issues were discussed and good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children. Good practice was noted in relation to confirming fosters motivation, category of approval and their strengths. In addition to providing Panel with a report of the statistics and activity within the service.

The Fostering Panel has clear written procedures in relation to the purpose, membership and decision-making. Panel member agreements are in place, which promotes their commitment to anti-discriminatory practice.

The Panel receives regular training; forthcoming training day is scheduled in April 2006. This training will incorporate the changing function of the Panel in relation to long-term fostering and matching approvals.

The interview with the Panel Chair further demonstrated the continual development of the Panel. A pre panel checklist is undertaken and pre panel meetings are held, to ensure cases are appropriately submitted.

The agency decision maker is the Interim Head of Children's Services. Formal meetings are now held between the Agency Decision Maker and Panel Chair, to discuss quality assurance and other issues, which promote and safeguard the welfare of children.



Highlighted issues effecting Panel included the provision of medical reports and medical advisors comments. Senior management are aware of the shortfalls and appropriate action is being taken, to rectify this issue.

# 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**

Tower Hamlets fostering service excels in valuing diversity and promoting educational achievement. The short break service continues to develop and benefits from the appointment of a Disability worker.

## **EVIDENCE:**

### VALUING DIVERSITY

The fostering service is commended for their commitment to meeting the diverse needs of children. Interpreting and translation services are incorporated and available in all aspects of the fostering service.

Tower Hamlets fostering service ensures that its foster carers provide care, which respects and preserves each child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background. Foster carers' preparation, training, handbook, policies and procedures incorporate the importance of valuing diversity and promoting equality.

The fostering procedures include a chapter on Equal Opportunities and Valuing Diversity. Seven standards have been developed which address identity and self-esteem, religious, cultural and linguistic background, in relation to recording and social work practice. This includes details of advocacy and support work to combat discrimination and maximise potential.

Specialist posts have been respectively introduced to address the needs of Vietnamese children and children with disabilities. The Vietnamese worker post will include interpreting, translating, liaising with the Vietnamese community, recruiting foster carers, supporting placements and organising a cultural workshop.

The Disability worker post has included promoting disability awareness, recruitment of short break carers, assisting in complex assessments, multi disciplinary working, supporting placements researching resources and services for children placed out of borough, and organising training on specific health/caring issues.

Training courses are available for foster carers to address helping children & young people to develop positive identity and self-esteem. In addition to caring for a child with a disability. Staff have additional planned training on Islamic perspectives in conjunction with the Council of Mosques. Topics have included mental health and fostering and adoption.

The service has entered into a partnership agreement with the Hadley Centre to study the experience of Black, Asian and Dual Heritage children in foster care (pathways to permanence). A report of this study will be submitted to the Department for Education and Skills.

The fostering service ensures that each child has encouragement; equal access and opportunities, to develop and pursue her/his talents, interests and hobbies. The fostering service is commended for the additional funding available for young people in this area.

## EDUCATION

The fostering service is commended for the educational support available for children. Tower Hamlets have a system where fostering households are provided with a computer. All foster carers have a specific education manual.

Foster carers visits and files evidenced foster carers are aware of their role in regards to school contact and creating an environment where learning is valued.

The fostering service supports group sessions to assist foster carers with improving children's literacy skills. A training video 'Care to Educate is also available. A tuition fund is available for young people to obtain extra tuition or prepare for exams. Additional English language support is funded for young people born overseas.

The Education policy on the education of looked after children highlights the Borough's commitment to improve educational outcomes. A Looked after children Education Team provides additional support.

Discussions with young people, foster carers and observation evidenced educational aspirations and encouragement by foster carers to achieve their goals.

### SHORT BREAK CARERS

In 2004 the Barnardo's Families Together project merged with the Fostering Development Team providing an in-house short-break service for children with disabilities. The foster carers and transferred workers have been incorporated into the Fostering Development Team structure and a specialist worker has been attached to the Recruitment and Assessment Team to further expand the options in this area. Birth parents remain central to the promotion of health and education needs.

Short break carers benefit from their own quarterly support group. The support groups have initially concentrated on their transitional feelings and practicalities. Short breaks procedures have been developed and fostering management recognise that further development is needed. Short-break carers are currently being remunerated to the standards expected by all Tower Hamlets foster carers and annual reviews have been undertaken.

Foster carers and staff highlighted the need for a specialist toy library to assist with activities during respite breaks. The fostering service is aware of this need and there are plans for the Foster Carers Association to seek funding for this provision.

# **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**

Tower Hamlets fostering service adequately promotes contact and children's consultation. Placements would benefit from further clarification concerning contacts.

## **EVIDENCE:**

### **CONTACT**

There are clear procedures setting out how appropriate contact arrangements for each child are to be established, maintained, monitored and reviewed.

Contact arrangement procedures are clearly detailed in the foster carers' handbook. The handbook highlights underlying principles, difficulties and arrangements. All foster carers spoken to were aware of their individual contact agreements. Fostering development staff provide additional support if needed to facilitate contact.

The foster carer support group observed focused on the issue of contact. This proved to be a very emotive issue and foster carers voiced their experiences. Examples being the inappropriateness of some contact meeting places and contact supervisors arriving late. Guidelines were also requested in relation to telephone contact.

Evidence was seen of a detailed contact agreement format, which included potential problems and health and safety issues. None of the files examined however contained this agreement. The fostering service should ensure placements are supported by detailed contact agreements.

Transport costs are included in the foster carers' allowances. There is the facility for additional support, if contact is some distance from the foster carer. Foster carers expressed their lack of clarity in relation to travel payments for out-of borough contact. It is recommended that further written clarification be given.

## CONSULTATION

Discussions with young people and their files evidenced that they were consulted on all aspects of their care. Young people and foster carers own children contributed to the annual review process.

Viewpoint an online web based interactive games system, which promotes participation and consultation for young people had been introduced, however its use has been limited within fostering households. A recent evaluation highlighted the need to relaunch this consultation tool.

The RAP user consultation group involving young people looked after continues to meet on a monthly basis. There continues to be an annual 'Speak Out' event for young people looked after.

# 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**

Tower Hamlets fostering service is commended for their commitment to the needs of young people preparing for independence. Tower Hamlets is also commended for their prompt and competitive payments to foster carers.

## **EVIDENCE:**

### PREPARATION FOR ADULTHOOD

The fostering service Tower Hamlets has invested heavily in and had developed an excellent service for young people leaving care. The fostering service undertakes to help young people develop the skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult life. There is a clear leaving care policy statement within the Children's Service Plan.

The Leaving Care Team has received a Charter Mark. The Continuing Care Scheme, operated in conjunction with the Leaving Care Service, makes provision for young people to remain with their carers beyond their 18<sup>th</sup> birthdays, where appropriate.

There are clear written requirements of what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing children and young people for independent or semi-independent living. Foster carers receive training and support to enable them to provide effective support and guidance.

## FOSTER CARER PAYMENTS

Foster carers are paid in line with independent agency rates. Foster carers reported that payments had improved since the introduction of the BACS system, which enabled payments to be paid into their respective bank accounts.

There is a written policy on fostering allowances. Current allowance levels are well publicised and provided annually to each carer. Foster carers receive clear information about the allowances and expenses payable and how to access them, before a child is placed. Increased payments are available for holidays and festival grants for Christmas or Eid.

All payments in relation to looked after children are authorised, certified, recorded and administered through the Access to Resources team. This includes payments to in-house foster carers and external providers. The Access to Resources Administrative Team is commended for their 'Team of the Year' internal award for their ability to remain calm under pressure.



# 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, 2, 4, 5, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 & 32**

Tower Hamlets is commended for its efficient and effective management, kinship care, recruitment and support of foster carers, staff and foster carer training, financial viability and processes.

## **EVIDENCE:**

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Statement of Purpose covers all topics as stated in Standard 1 of the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards. This includes the agency's management structure, services provided, objectives and values, relevant numbers of carers, staff, children, procedures for recruiting, approving and training carers, quality assurance systems and panel procedures.

The fostering service evidenced that the Statement of Purpose had been recently updated. The Statement of Purpose is available electronically and on the website as part of a prospective foster carer's pack.

The Children's Guide has been produced in two age appropriate brightly coloured, contemporary fileboxes'. The children's guide is child friendly includes information important to children, their family details, jokes, descriptions of terminology and feelings.

The fostering service is commended for translating the Children's Guide into Vietnamese to meet the needs of this sizeable group of young people.

## MANAGEMENT OF THE SERVICE

Tower Hamlets is commended for the overall management of the fostering service. The Inspection evidenced that the fostering service is organised, managed and staffed in a manner that delivers the best possible childcare.

A new Service Manager was appointed in July 2005. The Service Manager has approximately thirty years experience in social work and has seven years management experience in fostering. Qualifications held include a professional social work qualification and a Masters in Advanced Social Work (management stream).

The Service Manager is commended for swiftly addressing issues identified during the Inspection and plans of action are in place to further improve the service. All managers interviewed had relevant experience, had undertaken or were completing management qualifications and had a commitment to providing a quality service.

Tower Hamlets is currently transferring to an Integrated Children's Services joining Social Services with Education. The Corporate Director of Children's Services has been appointed. It is envisaged that the Head Of Social Care will be in post by June 2006. Transition arrangements were found to be

sound. Departments were optimistic, as there is a history of a good working relationship with Education.

Aiming High Together - Tower Hamlets Strategic Draft Children and Young People's Plan 2006-2009 vision states that "The children and young people of Tower Hamlets should get off to a flying start and should continue to learn in a safe, healthy and stimulating environment. These foundations will give them the grounding they need for a happy, prosperous life so that they can shape their own futures and become creative, responsible adults."

## MONITORING AND CONTROLLING

Tower Hamlets Fostering Service is commended for the consistent monitoring and development of the fostering service. Tower Hamlets Fostering Service had a clear strategic vision linked to national priorities and objectives. There are clear roles for managers and staff and well-established lines of communication. In addition to accountability between managers, staff and foster carers.

Regular meetings are held across Childrens Services at Service Manager level. Fostering Managers meet on a weekly basis. Networking meetings have been introduced with Children Services teams and hospital teams. Fostering Team Managers felt they worked as a management team, were well-supported and able to use their initiative and creativity.

All fostering teams have developed action plans linked to quality standards. Examination of team action plans and discussion with respective managers evidenced a cycle of continuous improvement and quality assurance. Fostering teams are commended for linking team action plans with staff individual performance development plans.

The Council Strategic Plan 2005-2006 highlighted the implementation of a strategy to maximise long-term stability of children and young people in public care. The fostering service is currently implementing a multi dimensional 'Treatment Foster Care Programme' to meet the needs of young people with complex needs or offending behaviour.

## MANAGED EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY

Tower Hamlets is commended for the effective and efficient management of their fostering service. The fostering service continues to exceed National Minimum Standards and evidenced the ability to consistently perform at an extremely high level. Team Managers and staff all demonstrated a commitment to constant improvement. An independent source commented that "Fostering is taken very seriously, standards are pretty good and the quality of management is very good"

Tower Hamlets is a Beacon Council and has maintained its status of being a three star authority. The fostering service was commended at the National Awards for Local Government in 2005. The Council is currently shortlisted for the Childrens Services Award for 2006.

## ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT OF STAFF

Tower Hamlets fostering service has a transparent management structure with clear lines of accountability. The fostering service is commended for the ability to deliver a service in an efficient and effective manner.

The Fostering Service has a stable team management team. Management structure includes support through Practice Manager Posts. Team Managers and Practice Managers are enrolled on appropriate management courses.

Discussions with staff and staff files evidenced the provision of professional supervision and consultation. There is adequate administrative back up, office equipment and infrastructure to provide an efficient effective service.

All fostering service social workers understand the role of the children's social workers, and there is a clear understanding about how the fostering service social workers and the children's social workers work effectively together. Files evidenced supervising social workers liaising with relevant social services departments and attendance at childcare reviews.

## SUFFICIENT STAFF/CARERS

### Staffing

The fostering service is commended for creatively producing a needs led service through the introduction of specialist posts. As previously mentioned a Vietnamese worker and Disability Worker have been appointed. Additional staff support should also be provided in Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team during recruitment campaigns to manage influx of enquiries.

Social work staff hold social work qualifications, the majority have post-qualifying qualifications or are currently in completion. Practice teaching is encouraged and students are regularly placed in the teams.

The fostering service has a virtually permanent and stable workforce. Staff policies encourage the retention of staff. Staff receive highly competitive salaries, clear workloads, study leave, regular supervision and access to a range of training. All staff reported that they were well supported and felt valued.

### Foster Carer Recruitment

The fostering service continues to be commended for its innovative recruitment strategy. The Tower Hamlets marketing brand has been updated to provide a fresher, look with greater use of colour and imagery. Colourful, well designed, easy to read recruitment packs have been produced in English, Bengali, Somalian and Vietnamese.

A marketing professional is in post. The recruitment strategy continues to use innovative and creative mediums. This includes a link to Mayor of London events, festivals, shopping centres, visits to community groups, editorial articles in local, national newspapers and specialist magazines, local radio stations, Magic, and specialist stations catering for the respective African Caribbean, Asian, Christian and Gay communities. Campaigns have additionally been featured on buses, bus shelters and a black taxi.

The service is commended for their partnership working with the Asian community, outreach work with the Vietnamese community and their progressive targeting of the gay and lesbian communities.

The fostering service website [www.fosteringandadoption.co.uk](http://www.fosteringandadoption.co.uk) enables applicants to register their interest on-line. A freephone number is additionally available for enquires 0800 279 9850.

Bimonthly meetings are held to discuss targeted recruitment. Targeted recruitment has included short-term break carers for children with disabilities.

The fostering service has a recruitment strategy plan to address the outstanding needs of teenage children and children from a White British background.

The service is commended for its innovation in recruiting foster carers for young people with complex needs and a filming project to address these young peoples needs is being produced.

The borough has produced a high quality information pack and dvd, which is available in English and Bengali. The information pack outlines the assessment process and competency information.

There is a clearly set out assessment process for carers. The recruitment and assessment team is commended for the improvement in fostering assessments. Assessments were found to more competency and evidenced based, with greater focus on the outcomes for children. The fostering service is commended for their survey of prospective foster carers in reference to reasons for withdrawing from the assessment process.

## FAIR AND COMPETENT EMPLOYER

Tower Hamlets fostering service is commended for their fair and competent employment practices and outstanding support available for staff and carers. Out of hours management and support services are available for foster carers. There are management systems for carer supervision, appraisal and support. Placement breakdown meetings are held and there are plans for these meetings to be independently chaired. There is a comprehensive health and safety policy and insurance for carers, children and staff, which covers all legal requirements.

A whistle blowing policy is available and staff and foster carers evidenced an awareness of this policy. Black and Asian staff are able to seek support and advice in relation to workplace concerns regarding their career and work discrimination.

## STAFF TRAINING

Tower Hamlets is commended for their commitment to the training needs and development of staff. Staff files and discussions evidenced a corporate induction. The aim of the induction is to meet the TOPSS (Training Organisation for Personal Social Services) Induction Standards. A mentor/buddying system is additionally available for newly appointed staff.

## ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUPPORT

The fostering service is commended for operating within an accountable and supportive structure. Staff discussions and examination of documentation evidenced that staff are properly accountable and are well supported within the fostering service. Staff had job descriptions in place. Staff receive regular supervision and have personal development plans.

Extensive fostering policies and procedures have been developed which have been updated in accordance with legislative changes and good practice. Team Meetings are held regularly and address relevant issues in relation to practice and workload management.

Staff had good morale, worked well as a team and at all levels felt individually valued. The fostering service evidenced regular team away days and good system of informal support and team building.

## MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT OF CARERS

The clear strategy for working with carers is documented, understood and commended. Foster carers remarked that teams were "very supportive". "very helpful" "get all the support I need"

Monthly support groups are held in East London. Currently staff in the fostering development team facilitates these groups. Plans are in progress to enable these groups to be self-run. Essex foster carers provide peer support through monthly emails. Specific support groups are provided for Bangladeshi, Black African and Caribbean and short break carers four times a year.

Children and young people who foster meet twice yearly. The group has not been well attended, however staff remain committed to its. Plans include producing a drama of these children's experiences. It is felt this group would benefit from a small budget to facilitate this group's development

The fostering service produces a quarterly newsletter, which is uniquely produced in English and Bengali. The newsletter highlights, training, legislative, staff and foster carer updates, activities, events and contact names and numbers.

The role of the supervising social worker is clear both to the worker and the foster carer. The fostering service has additional social work assistant posts to assist with practical issues.

Supervisory social work visits are undertaken on a six weekly basis; with at least one unannounced visit a year. The fostering development team is commended for having a clear agenda and structure for supervisory visits. It includes domestic issues, foster child, support network, development needs, equipment, health and safety, discussion with the foster carers own children and checking on recording. Good practice was additionally evident, in that foster carers also had the opportunity to reflect on each placement.

Annual review reports are prepared and are available to the Fostering Panel. There is a good system of communication between the fostering service social workers and the child's social worker. It was good to see that birth families also had the opportunity to feedback their views.

Tower Hamlets Foster Carer Association has been re-established with assistance from an independent consultant. The Foster Carer Association has developed an action plan and is scheduled to hold their second AGM in March 2006. An example of work undertaken includes organisation of a theatre workshop for foster during the February half term; Attendance at the National Fostering Network's Annual Conference; Involvement in recruitment campaigns and meetings with fostering management.

## SUPERVISION OF FOSTER CARERS

The fostering service is commended for the positive feedback received from foster carers regarding their supervising social workers. Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker and has access to adequate social work and other professional support.

A comprehensive Foster Carers' handbook is provided for all foster carers. The Foster Carers' Handbook corresponds with the National Minimum Standards and is written in practical, jargon free language. The fostering service is commended for additionally producing the handbook in Bengali. All foster carers interviewed fully understood their fostering responsibilities. Foster care agreements ensure foster carers have a full understanding of what is expected of their roles.

An Independent Foster Care Consultant provides support to foster carers facing allegations and complaints.



## FOSTER CARER TRAINING

Tower Hamlets is commended for their commitment to meeting the training needs of their diverse group of foster carers. Documentation evidenced that foster carers had attended a range of training courses. These have included the following alcohol and drug dependant parents, anti-racism, supporting children with ADHD, bullying, first aid, managing challenging behaviour in children with disabilities, monitoring and record keeping, sex and relationships, sexuality and children with disabilities, supporting children overcome mental health problems, transforming the difficult child, understanding and treatment of post traumatic stress disorder and young offenders.

The fostering service is commended for providing Pre NVQ training which addresses English as a second language (ESOL), IT and study skills. The fostering service is additionally commended for their NVQ programme for foster carers and cash incentives once completed.

There are plans for further foster carer development through a proposed mentoring scheme, where NVQ qualified foster carers have an opportunity to mentor new carers. Travel and babysitting costs for carers.

## CHILDRENS CASE RECORDS

Four children's files were requested and made available to be examined for tracking purposes. Information was available with regards to the basis of the placement, the intended purpose and intended duration with details of the young people's legal status.

Documentation evidenced that appropriate, accessible records are kept, in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers and foster children. There is a written policy on case recording which establishes the purpose, format and contents of files, and clarifies what information is kept on the foster carer's files and what information is kept on the child's files.

The fostering service ensures that the foster carer knows why the child is in foster care and understands the basis for the current placement, its intended duration and purpose, and the details of the child's legal status.

Training courses for foster carers are available that addresses recording and communication information and Life history work. The fostering service ensures that their foster carers store information in a secure manner and understand what information they are expected to keep and what information needs to be passed on to the fostering service.

## ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDS

The fostering service is commended for their use of information technology systems. In some teams compliance with maintaining the main SWIFT database has been 100%. The fostering service is commended for the implementation of a specific SWIFT system to meet the needs of the kinship care service.

Introduction of the Electronic Social Care Record, which aims to create a paperless office, is in progress. Representatives from the fostering service have been involved in the pilot project.

The fostering service keeps and updates separate records for staff, employed and independent/sessional, foster carers, young people, complaints and allegations. There is a system to monitor the quality and adequacy of records, and remedial action is taken when necessary. Foster carers files evidenced regular auditing.

Information about the procedures for dealing with complaints is widely available in different languages. Examination of the complaints and allegations evidenced that the fostering service managed issues appropriately. Records evidenced that issues were constructively addressed to inform future service provision and further improve practice.

The fostering service is commended for producing carer's profiles and for ensuring foster carers sign their supervisory visit notes. Foster carers' files additionally had case based supervision notes and a record of placements.

Confidential records are stored securely at all times and there is a clear policy on access. There is a written policy and procedural guidance for staff for the keeping and retention of case files ensuring that foster carers, fostered children and their parents know the nature of the records maintained and how to access them.

The system for keeping records is congruent with the Looking After Children System/Integrated Children's System. Written entries in records are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising, and distinguish between fact, opinion and third party information.

## PREMISES

Woodstock Terrace is the main fostering service premises, it was found to be suitable for the purpose. The wheelchair accessible offices are located in Poplar High Street, off the A13. The office is in close proximity to All Saints and Poplar Docklands Light Railway stations and several bus routes. Restricted and metered parking is in operation.

The premises have facilities for the secure retention of records and an appropriate security system. Records are securely stored in filing cabinets. The premises and its contents are adequately insured. The agency was found to have adequate administrative and information technology systems. The premises would benefit from the introduction of a loop system, to further improve on communication provision.

The Kinship Care Team is based in Norman Grove, near Roman Road. The team have a range of offices including a comfortable family room. An Accommodation Review is currently in progress and a final decision is scheduled for end of March 2005.

## FINANCIAL VIABILITY and PROCESS

Tower Hamlets Fostering Service is a financially viable Local Authority service. The fostering service is commended for their ability to respond financially to children's individual needs. A bursary scheme is available to assist young people to pursue their hobbies and interests. The fostering service as previously mentioned, fund additional educational and language support including computers.

Procedures exist to manage situations of financial crisis. Regulations and guidelines imposed upon Local Authorities are complied with. Children's Trust status has resulted in shared budgets across Health, Education and Social Services for children with disabilities.

The fostering service is commended for the financial arrangements for control and supervision of its financial affairs and powers. The Access to Resources Team collates management information in relation to placement costs, trends and profiles of children in foster care and foster carers.

The Acting Access to Resources Manager stated that there is no overspend and financial spreadsheets confirmed this. The Access to Resources Team database and related systems have helped forecast accurate spend, within budget. Budgets are regularly monitored and reviewed. Spending

commitments, financial forecasts and trends are routinely produced and scrutinised.

## FAMILY AND FRIENDS AS CARERS

Tower Hamlets fostering services is commended for its development of promoting kinship care and innovative practice evident in this team. This was evidenced by examination of policies, procedures, assessments, staff discussions and panel observation. Kinship care was noted to work extremely well in meeting the racial and cultural needs of children and young people.

The Kinship Care team has a strategic plan for training and support. There is a detailed action plan of objectives, linked to individual team members areas of responsibility. Kinship carers benefit from the informal family atmosphere, where they can walk into the office for adhoc advice. Detailed information on the service is available by link from the main fostering website.

The good practice developed within the Kinship Care team has received national recognition. The team was involved in the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) book 'Relative Benefits, Placing Children in Kinship Care'. There are also plans for editorial articles in the social care magazine Community Care.

The team is commended for developing particular tools, which addresses the unique nature of kinship work. A kinship focused Form F assessment format has been developed which highlights the main issue concerning contact.

Six weekly support groups are organised for kinship carers and a newsletter is regularly produced. Kinship placements benefit from individual support packages. The services offered include telephone support, supervision, advice, training, workshops, mentoring schemes, one to one sessions, advocacy and empowerment. An annual Fun Day is organised and kinship carers have access to a library of books and resource packs on child development, health and safety and health promotion.

The Kinship Care Team run a duty service, attend reviews and planning meetings, focus on early intervention by working closely with Children's Services Teams. The Kinship Care Team has been involved in joint working with the Post Adoption Support Team and demonstrated a commitment to integrated working with the Permanency Team. Work undertaken includes special guardianship work. The team is additionally commended for raising their profile at the last Staff Forum. A detailed presentation was given and a summarised version was observed during the Inspection.

Staffing has improved with additional social work posts and greater representation of Bengali speaking workers. As the work increases management should consider the introduction of a Practice Manager post.

# 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

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

<b>STAYING SAFE</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>3</b>	3
<b>6</b>	4
<b>8</b>	4
<b>9</b>	4
<b>15</b>	4
<b>30</b>	4

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

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

<b>ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>14</b>	4
<b>29</b>	4

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? N/A

**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

**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.	FS10	The fostering service should ensure placements are supported by detailed contact agreements.  Foster carers should also be updated on their travel allowances re: contact.
2.	FS17	Additional staff support should be provided in Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team during recruitment campaigns to manage influx of enquiries.
3.	FS21	A small budget should be available to facilitate the children who foster support group.
4.	FS26	The premises would benefit from the introduction of a loop system.
5.	FS30	The fostering service should consider more independent Panel membership.
6.	FS31	A specialist Toy library should be provided for short break carers.

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