



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

**London Borough of Barking & Dagenham
Fostering Service**

**Social Services Department
512a Heathway
Dagenham
Essex
RM10 7SL**

Lead Inspector
Catherine McGeoch

Announced Inspection
7th February 2006 09:15

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service London Borough of Barking & Dagenham
Fostering Service

Address Social Services Department
512a Heathway
Dagenham
Essex
RM10 7SL

Telephone number 020 8227 2233

Fax number

Email address

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) London Borough of Barking & Dagenham

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Baljeet Nagra

Type of registration Local Auth Fostering Service

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration: None

Date of last inspection 10th March 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham Fostering Service is a Local Authority Service. The service provides task centred, long term and kinship care for children and young people 0-17 years old and. The service also monitors private fostering arrangements.

The Service is proactive in attempting to recruit foster carers from the local area. All potential carers are subject to a thorough assessment of their suitability, including statutory checks and completed "Form F" assessments. In addition the service offers a comprehensive range of support, which includes home visits, and out of hours support as well as training to its approved foster carers.

The service has a placement finding role and liaises directly with the private and voluntary sector fostering and residential provision.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection was announced; so the manager and staff members knew that it was taking place. The main part of the inspection was carried out over 4 consecutive days, which started on 07-02-06. However, the inspector attended a Children's rights and participation group and the foster care support group beforehand.

As part of the inspection 4 home visits were undertaken to see foster carers and 7 children were interviewed in order to obtain their views. Therefore, the inspection ended on 15-02-2006. Questionnaires were sent to 10 children of which 2 were returned completed and 10 questionnaires were sent to foster carers of which, 4 were returned completed.

A range of documents, such as policies, procedures, case records, panel minutes and staff members recruitment and supervision files were examined. The inspector attended the main fostering panel, which is responsible for recommending new carers, and reviewing existing carers.

The inspector interviewed the team manager, service manager of the fostering service as well as a selection of staff members from the fostering team. The inspector also interviewed staff members from different areas of the children and families service including staff members from the LACHES team, Family Group Conferencing Service, Children's Social Work teams and the Children's Rights Officer and met with the Interim Director of Social Services, the Head of Children's Services and the Lead member for Children's Services.

During this inspection all the core standards, and many of the other standards were assessed as well as the Requirements made at the previous inspection.

The inspector would like to thank the foster carer's, children, young people, the staff team and managers for facilitating this announced inspection.

What the service does well:

It was apparent that management, staff, and foster carers show a high level of commitment to the fostering service, and have a vision as to how the service should develop.

The service has recognised that there is difficulty in placing young people with specific needs and therefore has put a tender out for a specialist service, in order to ensure that children and young people are in placements appropriate to meet their needs.

The foster carers spoken to spoke highly of the support they receive from their supervising social workers with regular home visits and telephone calls taking place.

The LACHES team contribute well to improving the standards for children's health and education.

The fostering service provides excellent training opportunities for staff members within the team.

What has improved since the last inspection?

There has been a good improvement in the educational achievement and health of Looked After Children.

The main panel is now quorate, and the panel operates a quality assurance function these were requirements made at the last inspection.

What they could do better:

The fostering service must ensure that children and young people are safeguarded by their recruitment, review and assessment practice.

All foster carers must be provided with the relevant information regarding the children and young people in placement, in particular medical consent forms.

Foster carers reviews must take place annually and the fostering service must ensure that foster carers are not be operating outside their terms of approval.

The functions of the fostering sub panel should be explicit and guidelines put in place.

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

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

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Being Healthy

The intended 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

Overall the fostering service promotes the health of the children and young people. However, there were two examples where carers were not provided with the necessary paperwork and details to ensure they have the information and consent to ensure that children's health needs are met.

EVIDENCE:

The carers spoken to during the inspection confirmed that the children in placement have received the statutory medicals and confirmed that they are sent letters reminding them when health appointments are due for the children in placement and they ensure that these appointments take place.

One carer had not received the medical consent form and was unsure who could give this consent. In addition, the paperwork provided to another foster carer did not have the medical consent complete. This carer stated that they had phoned the social worker in order to obtain consent for medical treatment. Another foster carer stated that they only received the medical consent form for one child three weeks ago, although the child has been in placement for three months. This carer reported that this was unusual as they did usually receive medical consent forms at the time a child is placed.

The inspector noted that the Looked After Children paperwork that should be signed by foster carers/parents and social workers was not always completed. One carer stated: "some information which a child shared to me of a very serious nature could have been given by a social worker. It explained to me some behaviour I have been able to deal with. The situation was improved when I knew this." Another carer stated that they were not provided with any LAC paperwork in respect of one child. The inspector noted that there was information on the foster carers file to support that some of the LAC paperwork had not been provided to the foster carer.

The fostering service should ensure that all foster carers are provided with the relevant paperwork, including written medical consent when the placement commences, to ensure that children and young people's safety and well-being is secured.

During the fostering support group some foster carers raised concern that children's therapeutic needs were not met. The interim team manager of the fostering service confirmed that on occasions there is difficulty obtaining therapeutic support for children/young people and the fostering service are currently waiting for guidance to be made available from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service in respect of this matter. The inspector saw evidence on one child's file that an assessment had been requested from the Child and Family Consultation Service and on another two children's files that therapy had been undertaken. In addition, the inspector spoke to one young person who stated that it had been decided that they needed counselling and as such it has been arranged. However, the young person stated that they did not feel they needed counselling and did not want to attend it.

The LACHES Team have a training programme for foster carers, which involves up to 10 groups a year. The training includes first aid, self-harm, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Some foster carers confirmed that they have attended training in first aid and mental health and there was evidence seen on some of the foster carers files inspected and from one of the foster carers questionnaires that first aid training had taken place.

Information obtained from the pre inspection questionnaire states: "the council has a good track record of looked after children's health outcomes at 95% at the end of September 2005 and has sustained this performance to date."

The healthcare, medical and mental health needs of children and young people are monitored and reviewed during the Looked After Children Reviews.

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 fostering service cannot fully evidence that children and young people are consistently safe through their recruitment, assessment and review practices.

EVIDENCE:

The inspector looked at three staff members files held by human resources as well as their supervision files.

The staff members within the fostering service have appropriate qualifications and experience and there was evidence of post qualifying training for some staff. There are two staff members who are not qualified social workers, but are currently undertaking social work training. The interim team manager confirmed that she retains the responsibility for the assessments and work undertaken by these staff members. During the inspection, the inspector interviewed two unqualified workers who both seemed to have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

On one staff members file there were gaps in employment history, for example the year was provided but no month and there was no evidence this had been explored. The fostering service must ensure that any gaps in the employment history for staff members is fully explored to ensure that children are safeguarded.

In addition, one staff members Criminal Records Bureau Check (CRB) was out of date, there was no evidence on the Human Resources file that a new check had been requested although the new CRB check arrived during the inspection and evidence of such has now been provided to the inspector.

As part of the inspection, the inspector requested an agency staff member's file, but was informed that the information is retained by the agency. This conflicts with information provided in the pre inspection questionnaire, which stated that the information is retained in the same way as permanent members of staff. Following the inspection, the fostering service confirmed that they have a copy of some of the information as set out in Schedule 1 of the regulations.

The fostering service must ensure that information in respect of agency staff is retained in order and available for inspection to evidence that the requirements in schedule 1 are met.

The inspector looked at 6 Foster carer's files.

All foster carers had up to date CRB checks in place. However, on one case file there was no evidence of a CRB check being undertaken in respect of an adult family member living in the household at the time of the assessment of the carer. In this case, the adult is still living in the household. This carer also confirmed that the Looked after Children in placement were having contact with another person within the family network who has not had a CRB check.

On another foster carers file it stated that a friend was babysitting but there was no CRB check in relation to this person. Since the inspection the fostering service have confirmed that this person does have a CRB check but that it is not kept in the foster carers file.

The fostering service must ensure that CRB checks are completed for all adults having contact with children and young people, to ensure their safety and welfare.

There was evidence that yearly health and safety checks are being undertaken by the supervising social workers, but on one file was out of date. On another foster carers file a health and safety check had been undertaken in October 2005, however was incomplete.

The fostering service must ensure that thorough health and safety assessments are completed in relation to all foster placements and action taken to eliminate any risk to the children in placement.

During one visit to a kinship carer the inspector was informed that the three female looked after children, one who has a physical disability, are sharing a bedroom with two cousins, one whom is male. This is a concern due to the age and needs of the individual children. The carer stated that they had been informed last week by the independent reviewing officer that they would have

been eligible for a grant to complete a loft conversion and were concerned that they had not been informed of this beforehand. The carer stated that they felt that this would have benefited the children and the family as a whole if this had been known at the start of the placements. Since the inspection the fostering service has agreed to look into this matter and liaise directly with the Housing Department.

During interviews with staff and managers in the fostering service it was confirmed that securing accommodation large enough for carers has been a difficulty in the past. However, grants were available to carers in order to extend their current housing. The service manager has acknowledged that ideally looked after children need to have their own bedroom. It is a concern that this carer was not given priority to be provided with such a grant.

The foster carers seen during this inspection confirmed that they have a copy of the foster carers handbook which they refer to when needed. The foster carers handbook is a good source of information for carers and it covers issues such as acceptable behaviour, notification of significant events, the procedure for missing children, managing challenging behaviour and other matters within a legal context. The foster carers spoken to were clear about acceptable use of sanctions and this is in their handbook.

The fostering service has guidelines in respect of the main fostering panels. However, the fostering team operates two panels, the main panel and the sub panel. The interim team manager confirmed that the sub panels deal only with foster carer reviews (not including the first). The inspector was told that there were no problems ensuring that the main panel was quorate. The inspector viewed the minutes for the main panel, which confirmed it is now quorate, this was a requirement made at the last inspection. The panel minutes stated that recruiting new panel members to ensure ongoing quoracy was on the agenda.

There is concern regarding the functions of the sub panel. The information provided by the interim team manager, stated that the sub panel are not in a position to make recommendations about changes in registration. However, in the minutes of the main panel held on 10-01-06 it stated: "the main panel are being asked to ratify three sub panel recommendations for change in carer's registration." However, rather than the case being presented to the main panel, only the minutes of the discussion of the sub panel are presented, although a representative from the sub panel attends the main panel. In the minutes of the main panel held on 10-01-2006 it states: "The Panel referred to the minutes of the fostering sub panel that talked about a respite placement." In this case the main panel did not ratify the recommendation made at the sub panel in November 2005. The inspector asked the interim team manager about this and was informed that the cases are presented to the sub panel so the information can be shared. It is concerning that contradictory information was provided to the inspector as to the functions of the sub panel.

It is not clear why cases are presented to the sub panel and then "ratified" at the main panel instead of being presented to the main panel in the first instance. Changes to a foster carers registration must be presented to the main fostering panel, which is a quorate panel and as such is able to make a recommendation.

During the inspection, the inspector attended the main panel and interviewed the chair of the panel. She confirmed that there are no policies or procedures in place regarding disagreement between panel members and stated that this has never happened. On the day of the panel, one panel member did raise some issues about the change in registration in relation to one foster carer. The inspector looked at previous fostering panel minutes and there was no record of individual's views. The fostering service should ensure that the panel member's views are recorded in the minutes to ensure that they can evidence how the decision is reached.

The main fostering panel has a quality assurance function and this is recorded in the minutes. The panel members raised concern in October 2005 about the quality of the reports presented to the panel, although the panel chair stated that there has been an improvement since this matter was raised. The main panel has also raised concern that foster carer's are operating outside their terms of approval. The inspector noted on one foster carer's file that they were approved for 1 child aged 0-3 years, however they had short- term placements for 3 children who were outside that age range. In addition, this carer was approved for 1 child, but had two children in placement prior to being presented back to panel on 10-01-2006.

One staff member stated that they thought it was unsafe for foster carers to operate outside their approval and they raised concern that some foster carers did not feel able to say no to placements, which are outside their terms of approval. The inspector spoke to the interim team manager about foster carers operating outside their terms of approval who acknowledge that this is not an ideal situation, however, stated that it is being monitored by the fostering panel and she believes the children's needs are still being met.

One staff member interviewed stated that they felt that at times they "don't feel children are matched to the right carers."

When foster carers operate outside their terms of approval this raises the question of whether children and foster carers are being matched appropriately. However, there was evidence that once presented to the main fostering panel that attention is given to matching children to foster carers.

The fostering service must consistently ensure that foster carer's are not operating outside their terms of approval and any changes to registration should be taken to the main panel.

The fostering service have identified that there is difficulty in placing children and young people who have specified high level needs and the department has put out a tender for specialist fostering placements for children that may be difficult to place. The head of children's service has reported that there has been a good response to the tender. It is good that the fostering service has identified this and taken appropriate action.

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

The fostering service values diversity and promotes the educational achievement of Looked After Children. The fostering service should consider how to ensure the role of parents is clear when children are receiving respite care.

EVIDENCE:

The staff group within the fostering service is culturally diverse and there are sound policies in place to promote equal opportunities. Foster carers receive training in diversity and the fostering service recruits carers from all ethnic backgrounds represented within the community. At times it is not always possible to place children with carers from the same cultural backgrounds. However, there is evidence that this is taken into consideration when approving placements at panel and such a discussion took place during the panel held on 07-02-2006, which the inspector attended.

During a home visit, one foster carer raised concern that on occasions consideration was not given to the cultural needs of the child. For example, a black child could be placed with a black carer but they are from different cultural backgrounds. These carers confirmed that in the event this happens they would undertake research to ensure that were able to meet the child's needs.

During home visits to carers and children the inspector was informed that children were provided with the opportunity to pursue their individual interests, which included dancing and attending specific children/youth groups. In

addition, some looked after children attend a drama/healthy eating group organised by the children's rights officer. As part of the inspection, the inspector attended the healthy eating group and the children and young people who attended appeared to participate well and enjoy themselves. The inspector spoke to one child who was new to the group and this child reported that the group was "good" and said: "I am definitely coming back."

The fostering service places a high priority on children's educational achievement. One foster carer spoke very highly of the LACHES team and stated: "they are a huge support". The carer reported the support included "maintaining regular contact by telephone but also visiting the home and have obtained computers for the children in placement". Furthermore, another carer confirmed that a staff member from the LACHES team supports one child at school.

The inspector interviewed the team manager for the LACHES team who stated that they run a Saturday homework club for children and young people. In addition they have set up a system for monitoring children/young people's attendance at school on a daily basis. In addition, the work carried out by the team aims to raise the expectation for young people themselves regarding their educational attainments.

The foster carers seen during the inspection confirmed that children had personal education plans and one carer said that they had seen a good improvement in children's educational achievement. Information provided during the inspection states that 91% of looked after children have a personal education plan." The head of children's service stated that there has been a marked improvement in children's educational achievement and information in the pre inspection questionnaire stated: "at the end of December 2005 40% of Looked after Children leave care with 1 GCSE, compared to 15% 18 months ago". There are currently 4 Looked After Children who do not attend school and the LACHES team are involved in looking at alternative provision. The LACHES team is commended for the improvement in raising the educational achievement for Looked After Children.

Currently, there is no policy or procedure in relation to children receiving respite foster care, which covers the role of parents in promoting health and education of children during respite placements. There is information in the foster carers handbook about children who are placed in voluntary accommodation, which highlights that parents should retain the responsibility for routine medical matters, but the foster carers agreement states "to arrange for any child to receive medical attention whenever ill or the agency requires."

The fostering service should consider the implementation of a policy and procedure about the role of parents whilst children are receiving respite care to

ensure that parents remain central to the health and education of their children.

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

The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for children and young people where appropriate and currently foster carers receive support in doing this.

EVIDENCE:

During the inspection there was evidence that contact between children and significant others where appropriate, is promoted by the fostering service. The inspector saw evidence on files that the level and quality of contact is discussed during Looked After Children Reviews.

The foster carers spoken to during the inspection confirmed that currently sessional workers provide support in taking children to and from contact and where necessary supervise the contact and thought this arrangement worked well. Some foster carers expressed concern that this arrangement was due to end and they have not been informed of the alternative support that will be provided. The interim team manager has confirmed that foster carers will continue to be offered practical support in contact arrangements and the head of service confirmed that systems would be in place to ensure minimal disruption until the new arrangements are launched.

One foster carer raised concern that the child's social worker arranged for contact to take place in their home, without the carers consent, and believed that this placed themselves and the other children in the home at risk as there was a history of aggressive behaviour. This contact was supervised by a worker and happened on one occasion.

Looked after children and their families are provided with the opportunity to express their views by participating in the statutory Looked After Children Reviews. The inspector saw evidence on files that where appropriate, children attending their reviews and also spoke to some children who confirmed that they attended. Some foster carers reported that although their views were sought, they did not always feel that this was taken seriously.

There was evidence on one child's file that they had completed "view point online report" which is a questionnaire to obtain the views of looked after children including their social worker. This is a good way to ensure that children have the opportunity to express their views.

The children's rights officer stated that he consults with looked after children in a variety of ways, which included holding groups and carrying out home visits. He confirmed that as a result of the consultation held with young people the department has introduced a new procedure regarding young people looking at their file.

The fostering service has a clear complaints procedure and one young person reported that they had used the complaints procedure.

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):

The fostering service ensures that foster carers prepare young people for leaving care and ensures that carers received prompt allowances, but on occasions there is sometimes delay in paying expenses.

EVIDENCE:

The inspector visited one young person who was in a supported living placement with a foster carer. The foster carer confirmed that there is a pathway plan in place for the young person, however raised concern about the assistance provided by the Leaving Care Team in relation to housing. The foster carers have shown an excellent commitment in preparing the young person for independent living which included further education, obtaining a driving licence and part time employment. The young person expressed concern about what help they were receiving from the Leaving Care Team in relation to housing and stated it was their wish to remain local to the foster carers, which is an out of Borough placement.

The foster carers seen during this inspection stated that they received fostering allowances promptly and all carers were all clear about what they were able to claim for. Two carers reported that there was sometimes delay in receiving expenses, but would receive them eventually. There is no clear guidance about what financial assistance foster carer's will receive during an investigation and one care raised concern that they only received a "retainer fee" during an investigation and was not reimbursed when the investigation was complete and the children returned to their care. The fostering service has confirmed that carer's are provided with a breakdown of allowances at the beginning of each financial year.

Currently, there is no policy in place regarding fostering allowances payable during investigations and the fostering team should consider how foster carers are informed of what financial assistance is to be provided during investigations.

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):

1,2,4,5,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,32

Overall the management within the fostering service is good and both staff and foster carers feel supported. However there is concern about the frequency of supervision of staff, as well as the reviews for foster carers. A further concern is as a result of this inspection there haven been 11 requirements made.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service has a statement of purpose, which was reviewed in December 2005. It outlines the aims and objectives of the service and the services provided by the fostering service.

Children and young people are provided with a "young persons guide to being looked after."

The interim team manager of the fostering service holds relevant social work qualifications and is currently completing the NVQ level 4, which will be complete by September 2006. The post of team manager has been advertised and the interviews will take place shortly. The staff members interviewed during the inspection stated they felt supported by both the interim team manager and the service manager. The post of deputy team manager is currently vacant and has recently been advertised. The interim team manager and the service manager are, currently supporting the staff members that would be supported by the deputy team manager. In the absence of the interim team manager the service manager is responsible.

The staff members within the fostering service have qualifications or experience that is suitable to enable them to carry out their individual roles. There are unqualified staff members within the team, who are monitored by the Interim team manager, as mentioned elsewhere in this report. There is a strong administrative team within the fostering service who were very clear about their roles and responsibilities when interviewed by the inspector. One of these staff members showed an overwhelming commitment to the service, as although unwell still came to work in order to be interviewed by the inspector.

There is currently a supervising social worker vacancy, and the interim team manager reported that this post has been advertised. In addition, there will be another post vacant shortly due to maternity leave.

The staff members spoken to confirm that they receive supervision from the team manager and evidence of this was seen on the foster carer's files as well as staff supervision files. Staff members have a supervision agreement, which states how often they will receive supervision. On one staff members file it stated that supervision would take place monthly. However, the supervision records viewed were 02/06/05, 15/08/05, 22/09/05, 05/ 01/06 (1 case discussed) and 17/01/06. On another file supervision had taken place on 23/05/05, 04/07/05, 08/07/05, 02/12/05,05/01/06 (1 case) 13/01/06 and 27/01/06.

The staff members spoken to confirmed that they could discuss anything in supervision. The records of supervision focussed mainly on task setting for individual cases and there was no record of discussion in relation to any other issues. The inspector discussed the issue around supervision with the interim team manager who accepted this was an area for improvement. It is positive

that the interim team manager had identified this is an area for improvement prior to the inspection.

The fostering service should ensure that all staff members receive supervision in line with the supervision agreement and the council's policy on supervision, and detailed records are kept of the discussions.

Staff members confirmed that Team meetings are held two weekly and staff appraisals are completed yearly. Of the three staff members files inspected, all three appraisals were undertaken in January 2006.

The staff members within the team are provided with excellent opportunities to attend various training courses. There was evidence on their supervision files of training attended, which included the Adoption and Children Act 2002, Managing and Assessing Risk, Child Protection and the Law, Ethics and Diversity. In addition some staff had undertaken post qualifying training. There was evidence that training had been discussed in appraisals and in some cases in supervision. The fostering service is commended for the training opportunities available to staff members.

In general, the foster carers spoken to confirmed that they received good support from their supervising social worker. Which includes regular telephone calls, home visits and supervision. In addition, generally carers were pleased with the support they received from the child's social worker. A questionnaire completed by one foster carer stated: "I have been supported in every way possible... keep up the good work." Another carer reported that they receive: "phone calls from the link worker and social workers help and occasional respite time is provided".

Foster carers have access to out of hours support and one carer confirmed that the support provided is good. On one occasion a foster carer reported that the supervising social worker provided 24-hour telephone support.

The quality of the recordings on the foster carers files overall was good. On most files there was good quality recordings of the discussions that took place and there was evidence of regular supervision between the supervising worker/support worker and foster carer. However, on one carers file there was no record of a home visit that should have taken place and on another file there was limited information as to the purpose and the discussions that took place during the home visit. In addition, some of the paperwork on file was not signed by the team manager or social worker and in some cases not dated these included matching reports and foster carers annual reports.

The organisation of the children's files was good and information could be retrieved easily. The inspector was informed that some information is stored electronically. In the case the inspector could not locate certain paperwork from files, the interim team manager then checked the electronic recording

system in respect of the fostering files and in some cases produced additional recordings. The children's files viewed were up to date although it would be reasonable to expect the signed LAC paperwork, mentioned elsewhere in this report, would be on the children's files.

The majority of the foster carers spoken to confirmed that they kept notes regarding the children in placement, and such notes were seen on one foster carers files. However, one carer reported that they only record significant events. Social workers and carers confirmed that life story work was completed with children and young people, which included keeping photographs, and memorabilia from outings.

The fostering service has systems in place to monitor and control the activities undertaken by supervising social workers and support workers. For example managers from other teams have audited some foster carers files. The inspector saw that such an audit was undertaken on one file. In addition the interim team manager stated that there are plans for her to start auditing the foster carers files.

Currently, the reviews for foster carers are not always taking place yearly. The department has recognised this and has confirmed that the outstanding foster carers reviews will be completed by March 2006. Currently, foster carers reviews involve independent reviewing officers completing an assessment which involves undertaking some home visits to the foster carers and spending time talking to the child/young person in placement.

The fostering service must ensure that foster carers reviews take place at least annually as outlined in the regulations.

The assessment process for some foster carers is not meeting the Government guidelines of completion within 6 months. A questionnaire completed by one foster carer stated "recruiting is too complex it takes over a year to get approved, it puts people off" another carer reported "it takes too long to process." The foster carer looked at a recent application to foster and the assessment process took 13 months to complete. The interim team manager reported that the delay in assessments is due to the fact that the service needs more staff members. On occasions the delays in the assessment process are due to further information being requested to ensure that prospective foster carers are suitable.

There was evidence on files that new foster carer applicants attend a 3-day preparation course and undertake a variety of training at different intervals and 14 foster carers are currently undertaking the NVQ training. Furthermore, 5 foster carers are undertaking the BTEC advanced foster care training. In addition, there was evidence that carers have the opportunity to attend a variety of training sessions in order to support them in caring for the children and young people. One carer raised concern that all training takes place during

the day and as they work full time they are not able to attend. Although the fostering service states that training is offered in the evenings and at weekends.

The interim team manager stated that Kinship carers do not have access to the Borough's training programme, however could attend one off training if there was a need identified. The inspector spoke to one kinship carer who stated that they had expressed an interest in attending training but was informed that this was not possible as they were not eligible for training. The inspector noted on this carers file that it stated that as a kinship carer they were not eligible for training.

The fostering service should consider reviewing the situation regarding the training for kinship carers; to ensure they receive the appropriate help and support in ensuring that the children and young people's needs in placement are met.

Since the last inspection the Commission for Social Care Inspection has had to reaffirm to the fostering service their responsibility regarding notifiable incidents. The concern held was that the fostering service was inconsistently notifying the Commission of initial child protection allegations and notifications of strategy meetings. Since this issue was raised there has been an improvement in notifications, however there is still concern about the delay in which notifiable incidents are provided to the Commission. For example a notification was received on 24/01/2006, however the first strategy meeting was held on 16/01/06. The Inspector discussed this with the team manager at the time of the inspection and since that time there has been a good improvement in the prompt response to notifiable incidents. The fostering service must ensure that they notify the Commission without delay.

The department holds annual foster carer award ceremony in recognition of the good work and commitment undertaken by foster carers. In addition, there are also looked after children awards. This is a positive way to recognise the achievement of foster carers, children and young people.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	2

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	1
6	2
8	2
9	3
15	2
30	1

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

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

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

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

No

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	FS3	20(3)(d)(i) Schd1(6)	The registered manager must ensure that any gaps in employment records in respect of staff members are fully explored and a written explanation recorded.	07/04/06
2.	FS3	20(3)(d) (i) ii)	The registered manager must ensure that they obtain the relevant information as specified in Schedule 1 in relation to agency/temporary staff members.	07/04/06
3.	FS6	11(a)	The registered manager must ensure that the foster carer's health and safety assessments are comprehensive to ensure the safety of young people placed.	07/04/06
4.	FS8	26(1)(b) 34(1)(b)	The registered manager must ensure that foster carers are not operating outside their terms of approval and that any changes to the terms of approval are presented to the fostering panel.	07/05/06
5.	FS12	17 (3) (b)	The registered manager must ensure that foster carers are provided with the looked after paperwork including signed medical consent without any delay.	07/04/06

6.	FS15	27(2) (a) Schedule 3	The registered manager must ensure that family members within the household over the age of 18 years and the foster carers support networks have a CRB check undertaken.	07/04/06
7.	FS20	21(4)(a)	The registered manager must ensure that staff members receive supervision in line with the supervision agreement and the Council's policy, and a record of such is maintained.	07/05/06
8.	FS21	29 (2)	The registered manager must ensure that foster carers reviews take place not more than a year after approval and thereafter at intervals of not more than 1 year.	07/05/06
9.	FS22	43 (1)	The registered manager must ensure that they notify the Commission for Social Care Inspection of notifiable events I line with schedule 8 without delay.	07/04/06
10.	FS30	25 (2)	The registered manager must ensure that individual panel member's reasons and recommendations taken at the fostering panel are appropriately recorded.	07/04/06
11.	FS30	26 (1)(c)	The registered manager must ensure that cases where there is a recommendation in the terms and conditions of foster carers are presented to the main panel and the information is provided in full rather than in minute form from the sub panel.	07/04/06

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
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	Standard	
1.	FS6	The registered manager should consider whether the household is suitable for children/young people who are placed with kinship carers.
2.	FS30	The registered manager should consider implementing a procedure which covers decision- making when all panel members are not in agreement.
3.	FS30	The registered manager should consider the functions of the sub panel and provide written guidance.
4.	FS31	The registered manager should consider introducing a policy and procedure about the role of parents whilst children are receiving respite care.
5.	FS32	The registered manager should consider introducing a training programme for carers who are family or friends.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Ilford Area Office

Ferguson House

113 Cranbrook Road

Ilford

IG1 4PU

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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