

INSPECTION REPORT

Fostering Services

Tower Hamlets Fostering Team

Family Placement Office

62 Roman Road

London

E2 0QJ

9th to 16th February 2004



FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

YES

Name of Authority

Tower Hamlets Fostering Team

Address

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

Local Authority Manager

Mr Jake Morgan

Tel No:

020 7364 2288

Address

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

Fax No:

020 7364 2161

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

3/2/03

Date of Inspection Visit		3rd February 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Mrs Kristen Judd	073292
Name of Inspector	2		
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.		No Lay Assessor was present during the inspection	
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)		N/A	
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Jake Morgan	

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Independent and local authority fostering services which fall within the jurisdiction of the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) are subject to inspection, to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Children Act 1989 as amended.

This document summarises the inspection findings of the NCSC in respect of Tower Hamlets Fostering Team. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, for independent and local authority fostering services respectively.

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards. The National Minimum standards will form the basis for judgements by the NCSC in relation to independent fostering agencies regarding registration, the imposition and variation of registration conditions and any enforcement action, and in relation to local authority fostering services regarding notices to the local authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000. The report follows the format of the National Minimum Standards and the numbering shown in the report corresponds to that of the standards.

The report will show the following:

- Inspection methods used
- Key findings and evidence
- Overall ratings in relation to the standards
- Compliance with the Regulations
- Notifications to the Local Authority and Reports to the Secretary of State
- Required actions on the part of the provider
- Recommended good practice
- Summary of the findings
- Report of the Lay Assessor (where relevant)
- Providers response and proposed action plan to address findings

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

Inspections will be undertaken in line with the agreed regulatory framework with additional visits as required. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report. The report represents the inspector's findings from the evidence found at the specified inspection dates.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Tower Hamlets Fostering Service is based in a culturally diverse London Borough, which encompasses the Bangladeshi, African-Caribbean and Somalian communities. There has been much development within the service over the last year. This has included new appointments to management posts and the formation of the Kinship team. The Fostering Service comprises of:

- Recruitment and Assessment Team
- Fostering Development Team.
- Kinship Care
- Training and Support Services
- Access to Resources
- Marketing and Publicity.

The Recruitment and Assessment Team recruits, assesses and prepares prospective foster carers for approval. The Fostering Development Team aims to support foster carers through supervision. Support is provided through regular visits, weekly telephone calls, regular training sessions. 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. Support Services include a Bangladeshi Resource Officer.

The Marketing and Publicity officer has further developed the recruitment materials to welcome applicants from diverse backgrounds; translation and interpreting services are widely available.

The service offers a range of placements which include short-term fostering/task centred, respite care, emergency, long term and kinship care (family and friends as carers). Services for children with disabilities are currently contracted out to a voluntary organisation.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

The Foster Care Charter states:

'Children and young people who are fostered deserve the highest standards of care, and it is the responsibility of all those involved providing a high quality service.'

Tower Hamlets fostering service have clearly continued to develop over the last year focusing on the young people's needs and the recruitment of foster carers to achieve the highest standards. The agency have actioned all of the requirements made from last year's report.

Since the last inspection policies and procedures are now in place to promote and plan the provision of high quality foster care for children and young people and systems are in place to ensure that these are updated regularly in January and July each year. The foster carers handbook will be updated once yearly in September in line with the procedures.

There has been further development in particular the Kinship Care, which strives to provide an individual service to meet the needs of kinship carers.

There are no requirements made during this inspection. Four recommendations have been made. The agency has received ten commendations. This reports clearly highlights the endeavours to exceed the National Minimum Standards and in an effort to provide the best possible care for the children in their care.

The inspector would like to thank the foster carers, young people and staff for their invaluable input into this inspection. In particular to the staff who assisted in the production of files and additional documentation for tracking purposes at short notice.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

The following statutory Reports or Notifications are to be made under the Care Standards Act as a result of the findings of this inspection:

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(3) of the Care Standards Act 2000 that the Commission considers the Local Authority's fostering service satisfies the regulatory requirements:

YES

Notice to the Local Authority under section 47(5) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of failure(s) to satisfy regulatory requirements in their fostering service which are not substantial, and specifying the action the Commission considers the Authority should take to remedy the failure(s), informing the Secretary of State of that Notice:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(4)(a) of the Care Standards Act of a failure by a Local Authority fostering service to satisfy regulatory requirements which is not considered substantial:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of substantial failure to satisfy regulatory requirements by a Local Authority fostering service:

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

YES

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

Providers and managers of registered independent fostering agencies must comply with statutory conditions of their registration. The conditions applying to this registration are listed below, with the inspector's assessment of compliance from the evidence at the time of this inspection.

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	Kristen Judd	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	_____	Signature	_____
Locality Manager	_____	Signature	_____
Date	30th March 2004		_____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements and recommendations are to be addressed. This action plan will be made available on request to the Area Office.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children Act 1989, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, or the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The Authority or Registered Person(s) is/are required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for fostering services.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice issues which should be considered for implementation by the Authority or Registered Person(s).

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS6	It is recommended that staff be aware of possible health and safety concerns within foster carers' homes particularly if home improvement work is in process.
2	FS8	The Emergency Duty Team should be made aware of the fostering guidelines.
3	FS10	It is recommended that contact arrangements at the carers' homes must be with made clearer, including within the placing agreement, handbook and during the pre- preparation course. This should include the reasons such as stability and congruity.

4	FS21	It is recommended that supervising social workers discuss and record the needs of foster carers individually to ensure that support needs are being met.

* Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix e.g FS10 refers to Standard 10.

PART B INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS

The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Number of Inspector days spent	5.5
Survey of placing authorities	NA
Foster carer survey	NA
Foster children survey	NA
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	NA
• Directors of Social services	NA
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	NO
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	NO
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	NO
Date of Inspection	9/2/04
Time of Inspection	10.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	45

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the NCSC assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards have been met. The following scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The scale ranges from:

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

"0" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

"9" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not applicable.

"X" is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- There is clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and of what facilities and services they provide.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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The inspector was satisfied that the Statement of Purpose clearly stated the aims and objectives of the service. The Statement of Purpose was reviewed and updated February 2004. The Statement covers all aspects as stated in Standard 1 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The Statement covers:	
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- | | |
|--|--|
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Fostering Services➤ Adoption and permanency services➤ Kinship Care. | |

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Fostering Services➤ Adoption and permanency services➤ Kinship Care.	
This includes its management structure, services provided, aims and objectives, principles and standards, relevant numbers of carers, staff, young people and complaints. In addition to procedures for recruiting, approving, training supporting and reviewing carers. Each section of the document is clearly written.	

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This includes its management structure, services provided, aims and objectives, principles and standards, relevant numbers of carers, staff, young people and complaints. In addition to procedures for recruiting, approving, training supporting and reviewing carers. Each section of the document is clearly written.	
The children's guide has been produced in two age appropriate 'filofaxes'. The children's guide is child friendly and appropriate.	

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The children's guide has been produced in two age appropriate 'filofaxes'. The children's guide is child friendly and appropriate.	
The inspector was informed that the Statement of Purpose would be reviewed in February each year.	

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering to do so in a professional manner.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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In addition to approximately eight years senior management experience, the Resources Service Manager has a professional social work qualification and substantial childcare experience in two other local authorities. The manager is currently undertaking Masters in public administration.

The inspector is satisfied that the manager exercises effective leadership of staff. In addition the operation endeavours to deliver the best possible childcare. The fostering service evidenced that it is managed by appropriately skilled management, to effectively and efficiently meet the demands of the service.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

Any persons carrying on or managing the fostering service are suitable people to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The inspector was satisfied through interviewing the service manager and additional staff their suitability to manage the service. Random selections of files were inspected and it was noted that necessary documentation was in place in accordance with Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is managed ethically and efficiently, delivering a good quality foster care service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

During the interview the inspector was satisfied that the manager was aware of his role. This role included setting procedures for monitoring and controlling the fostering service. There are clear roles for both managers and staff with established lines of communication; this was evidenced through observations, interviews held and documentation seen during the inspection.

The Access to Resources Team action pack details fostering allowances, other payments to foster carers, additional payments to children in placements, and also identifies trends. All foster carers spoken to during the inspection were aware of the payments that they should receive.

The placing agreement 4.2.2 places the responsibility on the foster carer to inform the London Borough of Tower Hamlets of any changes in circumstances that may affect the suitability as a carer. Evidence of this was seen during the inspection. Due to there being a significant change in circumstances within the household the supervising social worker reviewed the circumstances and prepared documentation to take the carer to panel. The inspector was satisfied with the assessment and proposed recommendation.

Number of statutory notifications made to NCSC in last 12 months:

12

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the service as unsuitable to work with children.

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

2

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.

3

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

2

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

5

Number of complaints made to NCSC about the agency in the past 12 months:

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****4**

The inspector was satisfied through interview that the fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently. In addition, as noted in Standard 16, the new format implemented for recording supervision and appraisals is an excellent working tool, the Inspector was satisfied that the structure of this tool ensures that staff are continually managed efficiently and effectively to ensure good service provision.

The structure is clearly laid out in the Statement of Purpose. There are clear levels of delegation and lines of accountability within the structure.

There are clear arrangements in place to identify the person in charge when the managers are absent. Within the teams on day-to-day issues a practise manager will deputise for the team manager, whilst in the absence of either team members can seek advice and support from either the service manager or another team manager within the service.

The managers have clear job descriptions that set out duties and responsibilities. All the managers spoken to during the inspection satisfied the inspector that they were fully aware of their roles and responsibilities.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The fostering service promotes and safeguards the child/young person's physical, mental and emotional welfare.

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

The fostering service makes available foster carers who provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Foster carers homes were found to be clean, comfortable, warm, adequately furnished and decorated. Each child - where possible - had their own rooms, which reflected their individual personalities. Within the matching policy (section 7) it provides guidance with regard to making placements and the accommodation available. It highlights that within the borough there is a large Bangladeshi community. This at times has to be taken into consideration as this part of the community does have a problem with overcrowding. It also highlights the importance an holistic assessment of the children's needs which should be used to inform the matching process, this may include being flexible with regard to accommodation if it is in the best interest of the child.

Health and safety is addressed within foster carers training and in the foster carers' handbook. The inspector was satisfied that service endeavours to ensure foster carers' homes are free of avoidable hazards that might expose a child to risk of injury or harm. Evidence was seen on all of the foster carers files with regards to health and safety checks being undertaken. Checklists are used which allow comments to be added, these were noted to being what was the carers' responsibility and what tasks the social workers would undertake. It was noted during the inspection that the checklist was not exhaustive. During one visit the inspector highlighted concerns over banisters rails missing. The manager arranged another check; the inspector was informed that actions are to be put in place to rectify the concerns. The inspector recognises that this was an usual situation as the carer concerned was undergoing repairs to the home; however, it is recommended that staff be made aware of additional health and safety concerns at these times if there is an ongoing placement. Foster carers confirmed that they were financially supported to provide items such as fireguards and appropriate car seats if required. All social work staff at the time of inspection have completed the necessary health and safety training.

All of the Foster carers spoken to during the inspection contributed positively to the inspection process.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

The fostering service ensures that children and young people, and their families, are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Tower Hamlets contains many different community groups in particular a large Bangladeshi community. The policy (section 4) highlights the challenge to respond '*effectively to complex and changing needs*'.

The policy states that services will be provided that will value and promote equality. With regard to emergency placements, if no suitable placement is available then the aim will be to achieve this within six weeks of the placement.

The policy covers children's rights, and how to encourage cultural identity and the importance of language. The inspector noted that issues had been raised within one case tracked and some of the comments made within a life book. The inspector was satisfied that following the incident the carer was advised of the concerns and was being guided as to the correctness of comments to be made in the future.

The foster carers' handbook addresses equal opportunities, valuing diversity and the needs of children with a disability. Training courses are available to address helping children & young people to develop positive identity and helping children to value their identity & developing self-esteem in addition to caring for a child with a disability. However, services for children with disabilities are currently contracted out to voluntary run organisations.

The service continues its work to address the needs of Bangladeshi foster carers, providing much support through training and supervision. In addition to the Bangladeshi resource post, which provides specialised support.

Files seen during the inspection demonstrated that foster carers and social workers were working co-operatively to address each child's specific needs. This was of particular note with regards to the support given to a complex kinship case.

The inspector is satisfied that the service makes effort to promote equality and value diversity.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The matching child with carer's policy (section 7) was seen. It is the responsibility of the Access to Resource Team to ensure there is no alternative to maintain a child in his or her own family or friends' network. The policy clearly states that no child should become looked after without *'the explicit agreement from the Access to Resource Team'*. The policy gives clear guidance as to the placement process and when considering a match what should be considered. It highlights that any placements made outside the carers' approved categories must only be undertaken with the agreement of the Team Manager of the Fostering Development Team.

Transracial or trans- community placements are undertaken if the carers are provided with additional training, support and relevant information to meet the child needs. The policy indicates what factors should be taken into account prior to placement. During the tracking of cases one placement was made transracial. However nine agencies were contacted to an effort to seek a suitable match. Evidence was also seen during the first supervisory visit of the supervising social worker assessing the situation and given the age of the child plus the nurturing care been received that it was appropriate for the placement to continue.

With regard to emergency placements the policy clearly states that where possible the duty team must follow the guidance and placements to be made only with carers who are approved and assessed as being appropriate for taking emergency placements.

However, during the tracking of cases it was noted that the emergency duty team had made one placement during the Christmas period which, although was a match with regard to race and culture, the placement was made to a carer approved for two young people where there were already two young people placed. The policy (section 7 page 6) clearly states that *'placements of children outside of a carers approval category should only be done so after agreement with the on call senior manager'*. The Emergency Duty Team should ensure that the *'matching carers with children'* policy is adhered to all times. It is recommended that the team be made aware of the guidelines.

The supervising social worker visited the foster carer concerned following the Christmas break: the inspector was informed that the case would be taken to the next panel to request a variation to approval.

The matching of children with foster carers is also addressed within the foster carers handbook. The inspector was satisfied that the service endeavours to match placements appropriately and there was evidence of placements enhancing the children's self esteem.

The Access to Resources Team have a checklist to assist social workers with making appropriate placements, taking into account ethnicity, religion, and cultural needs. The inspector was informed that there is a wide range of carers available within the service. Matching families and children training courses have been convened for social work staff.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)**The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****4**

The fostering procedures section 3 focuses on 'A Safe and Positive Environment'. It covers guidance for providing knowledge, information and skills to create a positive environment for looked after children.

Foster care agreements and the foster carers handbook clearly highlights that corporal punishment or any other form of sanction is not acceptable.

Child Protection training for foster carers is completed and it is expected that an update course be attended every two years. The foster carer handbook focused specifically on safe caring covering all aspects of abuse. This is also highlighted in the foster carers' agreement. This includes child protection procedures including recognising and responding to child abuse. Guidance is also provided for carers who are looking after children who have been sexually abused.

The handbook refers to Bullying. The missing child policy and procedure is incorporated in the foster carers' handbook.

There are practise guidelines (section 8) for allegations against social service staff and foster carers. Allegations are dealt within in line with the London Child Protection Procedures, which were available at the time of inspection. The agency is commended for the additional course for 'Men in Foster Care', which is designed to provide male carers with strategies for minimising the risk of allegation.

A record of allegations was seen. There is a system 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 service manager was aware of all the allegations and outcomes. The Independent Foster Care Consultant will record information about all allegations and complaints, and provide a summary to be discussed at quarterly monitoring meetings. A report will be produced annually to highlight patterns, weaknesses with suggested solutions. The inspector was satisfied that the management would use outcomes to evaluate future practise.

The agency is commended for their culturally specific child protection training in relation to the needs of the Somalian and Bangladeshi communities. The aim of the course being to provide a multi-agency and multi- cultural forum for considering effective intervention in families who are from a range of cultural backgrounds.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:

0**%**

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

The foster carers' agreement point 5.2.9 states that foster carers will *enable* and *encourage* contact with family. Contact arrangement procedures are clearly detailed in the foster carers' handbook. The handbook highlights underlying principles, difficulties and arrangements. All the carers spoken to were aware of the individual contact agreements. However it was highlighted by carers that contact sessions happen in the carer's own home and felt that support was not given or offered by the agency. The carer's seemed surprised during interview there may be an alternative places to support contact. However, evidence was provided which indicated that some contact had been made away from the home. There were reasons in this particular case where it was considered better for the young person placed for contact to be at the carer's home. The handbook section 1 sub section 9 does not clearly state that contact could be in the foster carer's home. It is recommended that contact arrangements at the carer's home must be with made clearer, including within the placing agreement, handbook and during the pre- preparation course. This should include the reasons such as stability and congruity.

The inspector was satisfied that the carers were aware of their responsibilities with regard to supporting contact visits. Files evidenced that carers reported to the child's social worker outcomes of contact arrangements. The carer in one case reported concerns with regard to the attachment between parent and child, which were recorded on the child file.

Transport costs are included in the foster carers' allowances. There is the facility for additional support if contact is some distance from the carer. The supervising social worker has to agree the payments. Evidence was seen of this allowance being paid.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****4**

Evidence was seen of foster carers and supervising social workers attending reviews. The inspector was satisfied that the fosters carers were able to understand and the importance of children's views. The service has produced two children's guides/ handbooks, aimed at different age groups. These cover the complaints procedure, children's rights, advocacy and how to ask for help. They are presented in a filofax style and are in a suitable language for children.

The service funds a Children's Rights officer, which is independent of Social Services. A user led service is provided.

Tower Hamlets Children & Young People Right Service have produced an annual report as part of a joint project between themselves and the NSPCC. Evidence was seen of the referrals made to the service with outcomes. This included basic information enquires to complaints. The children spoken to during the inspection were aware of how to raise concerns or make a complaint.

A report of the 'Waass Uuupp!!' annual event held on October 03 for looked after children

and leavers was seen. The next event was planned during half term on 17th February 04. The events organised combined issue based and fun based activities with workshops.

The quarterly 'Tower Hamlets Children's Rights Newsletter' was seen, it is informative giving information on subjects such as social services and educational issues. The RAP (Rights and Action Players) group have also set standards for communicating with looked after children and care leavers. The agency is commended for these standards have being implemented for all staff who work with young people in Tower Hamlets.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

The fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, together with information and training appropriate to her/his age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about her/his health needs.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The foster carers' handbook specifically addresses health care and development. This clearly outlines the carer's role in terms of helping to promote the health of any child in their care.

Evidence was seen during the visits undertaken during of carers registering the children with local doctors and dentist. The inspector was satisfied during the visits that carers were fully aware of the health and development needs of the children and young people in their care. Evidence was seen at all foster carers homes of records being kept of health appointments. The inspector was satisfied that carers were assisted to make keep appointments.

Core training is given in first aid. This is a two day training course which results in a certificated valid for three years. Additional core training is in child development. Files seen included the health needs of children in foster care and there was evidence of discussion in the reviewing process.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

The fostering service gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person in foster care and ensures that she/he is encouraged to attain her/his full potential.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The Education policy on the education of looked after children highlights the Borough's commitment to improve the educational outcomes for looked after children.

Foster carers visits and files evidenced the carers were aware of their role with regards to school contact, creating an environment where learning is valued; establishing an expectation of school attendance and supporting the child's full participation in school life. The service aimed to provide computers for all young people in their care, focusing on in-house placements primarily. The inspector was informed that all placements that requested machines have them, and the agency is now looking at providing laptops to those who requested them.

There was evidence of educational plans on young peoples files. One of the cases tracked highlighted the young person educational special needs. There was evidence that these were being addressed and that the carer was fully aware of the educational support being received.

The agency has an educational support pack for designated teachers, social workers and foster carers with responsibility for children and young people in public care. The pack endorses the appropriate educational provision for all looked after children. The service gives high priority to helping foster carers meet a child's education needs.

The practise guidance gives guidance to foster carers as to how to choose a school if the looked after child is not in education, preparing to leave education and the assisting with higher education. It also covers the advantages of under 5's attending nursery and how to deal with starting school for the first time. There is an additional policy on exclusions and special needs.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

The fostering service ensures that their foster care services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Tower Hamlets have a clear leaving care policy statement within the children's service plan. The fostering service undertakes to help develop the skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult life. The '*assisting carers to prepare looked after children for adult life*' policy guidance highlights the importance of joint working with housing service, education, employment service to support the young people leaving care. Foster carers receive training and support to enable them to support the young person who is moving on. The '*Preparing Young People for Independence*' training is two evening workshops that are open to both the carers and the young people.

The Leaving Care Service consults with the young people with regards to the future, the decision making process in line with the Pathway Plan. There is a commitment that a worker from the leaving care team will attend reviews of all young people aged 16 to ensure that preparation for independence.

Section 12 of the foster carers' handbook addresses preparation for Adult life. This details clear written requirements of what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing young people for independent and semi-independent living training.

None off the cases tracked during this inspection had looked after young people who were preparing for adult life.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in foster care. The number of staff and carers and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the organisation.

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

Any people working in or for the fostering service are suitable people to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The agency has a corporate recruitment procedure in place. The inspector was satisfied that the procedure was clearly written and followed good practice in safeguarding children. The inspector was satisfied that recruitment procedures were consistently adhered to for permanent staff.

The service has developed a checklist to enable team managers to check personnel details of agency staff. All files seen contained contain photo identification, qualifications, CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) checks and two satisfactory references.

The inspector was satisfied that the social work staff had a good understanding of foster care and the appropriate knowledge and skills. Workers carrying out assessments and approvals were appropriately supervision by the manager who has the necessary experience and takes responsibility for the assessments and approvals. The inspector saw evidence of individual written guidance with regards to assessments by the manager.

Total number of staff of the agency:

28

Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:

6

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

Staff are organised and managed in a way that delivers an efficient and effective foster care service.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

The management structure attached to the Statement of Purpose has clear lines of accountability. The inspector was satisfied during the inspection that staff were aware of the management structure. Social workers based in the fostering teams attend children's reviews. Staff spoken to during the inspection stated that there are appropriate systems in place to manage and supervise workloads. External consultants are used at times to complete assessments.

Carer's felt that the assessments and approval are managed effectively and efficiently. The Inspector was satisfied that there are now clear structures and systems in place to ensure assessments, approvals and reviews, of carers are managed and implemented effectively. The current manager is at present dealing with a backlog. This is addressed in standard 21.

Evidence was seen during the inspection of supervising social workers liaising with relevant social services departments with regards to the young people in their care.

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets currently contracts out fostering for children with disabilities. Quarterly contact and monitoring arrangements for these placements have been developed to review quality of care and contract compliance.

Through interview the inspector was satisfied that the service manager` was aware of the agencies used and had a working knowledge of their inspection reports.

During the inspection a selection of staff files were seen, these are well maintained in a set format which include supervision records, personal details, qualifications (certificates) records with regards to sickness and annual leave and Personal Assessment Development plans known as PAD. The system was extremely clear and accountable.

Supervision was regularly and all staff stated that they received signed copies of supervision records. Evidence was seen with regards to guidance with the assessment process and the practise is to discuss each case that the supervising worker may have concerns or wish to update the manager at each session. The supervision recording seen was comprehensive.

All the managers found, as previously stated in Standard 5, the new format an excellent working tool, the inspector was satisfies that the structure ensures that staff are managed in an effective and efficient manner.

The inspector was informed that all the Team Managers are either currently on or enrolled for September 2004 on a three tier management course commencing with the Certificate of Management studies.

The inspector was satisfied that there is adequate administrative back up to ensure the smooth running of the fostering service.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	4
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The fostering recruitment strategy outlined the plans for 2003-2004. The ultimate goal of the campaign was to increase the number of foster carers and improve the service to the public. The agency is commended as it has developed branded marketing programme, this was following research, which indicated that there was a negative perception of social services. The primary aim is to focus on recruiting a range of carers to meet the needs of the children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service. The package is sent to anyone who makes an initial enquiry with regards to fostering and comprises of information and a DVD to watch. The DVD is in English/Bangla. The inspector felt that the DVD was an excellent presentation, which contained interview with current foster carers describing their thoughts, experiences apprehensions when they first became foster carers and general common questions asked. The package highlights that people who are single, married divorced, with or without children, in the same sex or heterosexual relationships from different ethnic backgrounds and religions can foster and gives guidance around the different types of fostering and gives an overview of the assessment process. It is well written and easy to

follow. The whole presentation of the information pack is of an extremely high standard.

There has also been a launch of a website. The aim to increase access to information and encourage new applicants. There is also the facility for current foster carers to access information; training issues and information by the use of pass words. The inspector accessed the web site and found it informative. Data was evidenced during the inspection with regards to the activity on the web site. This is being used to evaluate the service.

There is a clear assessment process of foster carers (section 5) covering the whole assessment process and is clear guidance to social worker staff and timescales. Following the initial enquiry an information pack is sent out within two days. Once an application has been received the applicant attends preparation training, which in the case of a couple it is to include the partner, additional family members may also attend. Once the assessment commences it the guidance provide social workers with clear objectives at each stage for example the completion of CRB checks at the first assessment visit. The guidance states that the assessment should normally be submitted to panel within 4-5 months of allocation, this should include 6-8 assessment visits, writing up, submission to manager, any additional work and distribution /reading time for panel.

There are additional practise guidance notes for social workers and administrators with regards to the assessment process, these cover initial enquiries, eligibility criteria, guidance of accommodation issues, the importance of making applicants aware of how intrusive the assessment process can be, competencies and transferable skills. The applicants are given checklist to assist the to understand the assessment process.

The guidance highlights that a good assessment should be:

- Efficient
- Effective
- Through
- Fair.

The inspector tracked one recently approved carer. The inspector was satisfied that the process /guidance was followed, and that the current process of recruitment is robust and through to ensure that carers are approved to meet the needs of young people for whom the service is provided. The carers confirmed this during the inspection.

Section 13 of the handbook is devoted to the assessment of carers. This also provided a step-by-step guidance for carers, and advice with regards to the relevant checks that will be made during the assessment process. Carers spoken to during the inspection stated that they had been well informed with regard to the process.

The Bangladeshi resource officer additionally liaises primarily with the Bangladeshi community and can assist with the assessment process is required.

At the time of inspection there was adequate staff levels to meet the needs of the service. Current vacancies are filled with agency staff.

During the inspection staff stated that they were well supported through training and supervision. At the time of inspection staff had attended a lot of training in a short period of time, however staff informed the inspector that workloads had been adjusted at this time. The training manager outlined that systems were in place to assist staff including study leave. In particular the PQ award has been re structured to provide more study time, which was highlighted as a problem for staff in the previous inspection.

Carers are supported well through supervising social workers and training. Carers are encouraged and supported to undertake the access course and NVQ Level 3; there is an incentive scheme to complete with a one of payment and increased weekly allowance. At the time of inspection 14 carers had completed NVQL3 and 15 were in the currently studying This represents approximately 33 % of total carers will be qualified with a year.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The inspector was satisfied that the service is a fair and competent employer with sound practises and good support available for staff and carers.

The whistle blowing policy (section 16:4) was seen, this is an interim procedure, which had been put in place, which will be superseded by a more general document, which is being developed. This is due for implementation later in the year. The policy indicates circumstances when staff may wish to discuss concerns and whom to approach.

There was a booklet produced for staff 'Speak up in Safety' Managers of Choice Scheme. It is an informal avenue for Black and Asian staff to seek support and advice about the work place, concerns in regard to their career and work discrimination.

Carer's supervision, appraisal and support – Section 2 sub section 14 of the handbook provided guidance of the supervision and support carers should expect. It details what is supervision, where it should take place and what should be discussed. All carers spoken to during the inspection were aware of supervision and felt well supported. It also clearly highlights the role of the supervising social worker.

There is currently a duty system in place. On-call week on week off staff are payment enhancement to undertake duty on call.

The foster carers agreement (point 7.1.1) lays out the borough insurance cover. It clearly states that foster carers must in addition have household insurance and inform the insurance company that they are carers. Evidence was seen of the insurance liability cover until September 2004.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)**There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****4**

All staff and foster carers stated that there was an excellent range of quality of training available. Training was additionally available for agency staff. Tower Hamlets are dedicated to the training needs of staff and have an extensive programme for the whole directorate. The service has extended the commitment to provide specific training programmes for the family placements service. In addition to a separate comprehensive fosters cares training programme.

Staff have Personal Assessment Development plans known as PADs. These were seen during the inspection. The inspector was informed that the PADs are evaluated and are discussed at the Training Strategy Groups, which are held monthly. The evaluations are used to commission training required.

As previously stated in standard 17 staff stated that they attended a lot of training in a short period of time, but workloads had been adjusted at this time. The training manager outlined that systems were in place to assist staff including study leave. In particular the Post Qualifying (PQ) award has been re structured to provide more study time, which was highlighted as a problem for staff in the previous inspection.

Specific Induction Packs have been implemented for both the Fostering Development Team and the Access to Resource Team. The aim of the induction is to meet the TOPSS (Training Organisation for Personal Social Services) Induction Standards. The programme is staged over a ten-week period. At the time of inspection no new staff had commenced employed, therefore this could not be evidenced. However all managers were aware of the programme the their responsibilities.

The inspector was also informed that the kinship team were receiving specialist training which had been accessed in Northampton.

Teams also have team building sessions one of which is to evaluate training received and to look at integrating it into practise and to identify gaps.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**All staff are properly accountable and supported.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

Fostering policies and procedures have been developed these provide staff with clear written details of duties and responsibilities expected of them together with procedures of the organisation. The inspector was satisfied that staff are properly accountable and are well supported within the fostering service. Staff had job descriptions in place.

As previously stated in standard 16 evidence was seen of regular supervision being received by staff. Sessions were planned in advance. The supervision recording was comprehensive.

Team Meetings were held regularly and these were observed during the inspection. These meetings addressed relevant issues in relation to practise and workload management. Staff felt they worked well as a team and received regular supervision. Evidence was seen of staff receiving regular planned appraisals from their line manager.

The inspector was satisfied that staff were properly accountable and supported within the service.

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)

The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

A clear strategy for working with carers has been developed. This is clearly detailed in the foster carers handbook section 14. Supervision social workers are expected to visit once a month with at least one unannounced a year. This is to supervise, offer support in addition to identifying training needs for foster carers. Foster carers spoken to during the inspection had a named allocated social worker and were generally very complimentary about the staff; two in particular had been through particular individual issues and felt that they had been extremely well supported and guided throughout by staff. However' one family had a change of Supervising Social Worker who did not visit or call on a regular basis, they had to make a complaint and this has since improved but stated that it was still not ideal. They wanted to emphasis that support may be needed however experienced a carer was, particularly if a child is having a difficult time. Information provided showed that supervision had met the minimum requirement. It is recommended that supervising social workers discuss and record the needs of foster carers individually to ensure that support needs are being met.

The Foster Carer survey reflected that 100% of carers were assigned a supervising social worker 97.5% stated that they were contacted at least monthly.

Social workers complete a record of the supervising visits which are signed, and copies are given to the carers The inspector was informed that this method has been in place for the last four months. The inspector was satisfied that supervising social workers were aware of their roles and responsibilities.

Annual reviews are completed and those seen were in-depth, cover the competencies and provide a development plan for the following twelve months. Through the tracking off cases it was noted that some were out of date. The agency had been behind previously on annual reviews and the inspector was `satisfied that the recently appointed manager is working towards reviews being completed on time.

The service additional social work assistant posts to assist with practical issues. The assistant social workers may assist in purchasing clothes for a young person going into foster care, run carers support groups and completing health and safety checks. The inspector was informed that the assistants work under clear direction and supervision by the social workers and the team manager in a supportive role.

A peer telephone support is in place for foster carers and regular consultation meetings are held with management. In addition to regular monthly foster carers support groups. There is also a support group for Bangladeshi fosters carers who meet four times a year.

The service has reviewed their childcare support service to meet foster carers needs. Training venues are now provided where possible with crèche facilities, this was observed during the inspection. Foster carers can claim childcare expenses for attending training and support groups if there are no crèche facilities. In addition if they are required to attend meetings and other related appointments if the child is not to attend in connection with the foster placement. In exceptional circumstances this can also be used for the carers own children. The allowance must be discussed with the supervising social worker for agreement.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)

The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

The inspector was satisfied that all the carers spoken to during the inspection had a full understanding of what was expected of a Foster Carer. The inspector was satisfied that there are practical systems in place to support foster carers. The foster care agreement is clear with what is expected from the foster carer and the local authority.

The Foster Carers' handbook is very comprehensive, easy to reference and has been written in a jargon free way. The Handbook refers to and corresponds with the National Minimum Standards. The handbook is due to be updated in September 2004. All carer had copies of the handbook.

The handbook and placing agreement details the supervision arrangements, foster carers should receive. The placing agreement states that:

- Permanent and short breaks foster carers will normally be visited at not less than three-monthly intervals.
- Task Centred Foster Carers should be visited regularly at least every six weeks.

Carers were aware of the supervising social workers and were comfortable with contacting them at any time for advice and consultation. This was confirmed through the tracking of cases during the inspection. Copies of supervision were seen on the foster carers files. Carers spoken to confirmed that visits are also under taken on an unannounced basis. Evidence of this was seen on foster carers files.

The inspector was satisfied that there is practical support with regards to point 22.7 of the National Minimum Standards.

The Foster Carers' Handbook has a chapter referring to complaints and the corporate complaints and representation procedure. The procedures were seen at the time of inspection, they were comprehensive, state timescales and highlighted good practice. The Foster Carers' Handbook details the procedures in relation to allegations of abuse against the carers or members of their family. As previously stated in standard 9 there is a system 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.

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

The aim of the service is to raise awareness and provide training to foster carers relating to situations, which may give rise to complaints and promote methods of minimising these situations. The service will also raise awareness with associated professionals with the overall aim of reducing the number of complaints and allegations in the future, and minimising the impact on foster carers who are in the subject of a complaint.

The advocacy service is provided on a one to one basis, to give direct support to individual foster carers who are subject to a complaint or allegation. The consultant is also providing eight raising awareness events during the year. The events are to be arranged via foster carers local support groups. There are also to be up to four training sessions to inform participants about the impact on foster carers of having a complaint or allegation made against them and to familiarise participants with the policy and procedures.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	4
<p>There is in place a three-day post approval/pre placement course, which has to be completed by all newly approved carers. In addition to core training there is a programme of further training that carers can attend such as child protection practise update, safe caring practice, and men in foster care. The programme has been made available for all members of the foster carers household. There are also skill acquisition courses such as English for speakers of other languages, NVQ Access course and Information and Technology.</p> <p>The agency is commended for the training offered to new applications to foster care where English is not the first language. During discussions with regards to the next pre placement course social workers raised the possibility of providing an additional day for prospective carers whom English is not their first language to give basic information in Bangla. This was agreed by the manager to be implemented. These are the types of good practise issues that the agency has demonstrated throughout the inspection.</p> <p>Foster Carers' reviews contain information with regards to training completed since the previous review and development plans for the coming 12-month period. Evidence was seen of recommendations with regards to additional training or support required.</p> <p>Point 3.1.10 of the placement agreement highlights the commitment to developing the NVQ for foster carers. Carers spoken to during the inspection have achieved the qualification and others were about to commence. The inspector was also informed that an incentive is offered to carers to undertake the course of a one off payment of £250.00 presentment to them with the award and additional higher weekly allowances of £30.00. The carers are also encouraged to continue their professional development by becoming an NVQ assessor. They will received an additional £250.00 one off payment and up to £1,200.00 per full assessment. Carers who successfully complete four modules of the NVQ can also claim up to £100.00 for books and stationary. The agency is commended for the commitment to comprehensive training.</p> <p>The service has set up a <i>Sons and Daughters Group</i> to provide support to the children and families of Foster carers. The group is made up of a core group of children and staff from the</p>		

Development team. During 2003 two events took place and the decision are yet to be formalised with regards to the events or support to be offered for the coming year. The group intends to have a page on the website soon to promote the group further.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- All appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers and foster children.

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child or young person in foster care which details the nature and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of her/his life events. Relevant information from the case records is made available to the child and to anyone involved in her/his care.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Seven children's files were requested and made available to be examined for tracking purposes; however, the National Care Standards Commission are unable to comment on these files as they are currently under the jurisdiction of the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI). Information was available with regards to the basis of the placement, its intended purpose and intended duration with details of the young people's legal status.

Documentation evidenced that all appropriate records are kept and accessible in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers and foster children.

Training courses for foster carers are available that addresses recording and communication information and Life history work. Section 8 of the Foster Carers' Handbook details recording and accessing information.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

The fostering service keeps and updates separate records for staff, carers, young people, complaints and allegations. Confidential records are stored securely at all times and there is a clear policy on access. Written entries in records were found to be legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising and distinguish between fact, opinion and third party information. Records are kept of checks and references that have been obtained and their outcome.

Foster carers files contain the following: key information, Form F assessment, approvals/reviews, contact sheets, correspondence, training, finance, checks, allegations/complaints and children. In addition copies of relevant information pertaining to the foster child in placement were located on the foster carers files. This included Form E, reports and review information. As previously stated in standard 21 some reviews were out of date at the time of inspection.

The recording policy highlights that foster carers must retain records for 10 years.

Panel members have to sign a confidentiality agreement.

Evidence was seen on cares files with regards to complaints, there was also the conclusion and action taken recorded. As previously stated in standard 9 a system is in place for keeping records of allegations and complaints. The Independent Foster Care Consultant will record information about all allegations and complaints, and provide a summary to be discussed at quarterly monitoring meetings.

As previously stated in standard 24 seven children's files were examined for tracking purposes however the National Care Standards Commission are unable to comment on these files as they are currently under the jurisdiction of the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI).

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:		86
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:		28
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:		20
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:		14
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:		13
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	220	Maximum £
		300

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

Premises used as offices by the fostering service are appropriate for the purpose.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The main premise used as offices by the fostering provider is suitable for the purpose. The offices are located in Poplar, behind Poplar High Street off the A13. The office is in close proximity to the Docklands Light Railway station and several bus routes. Restricted parking and metered parking is in operation. The building is wheelchair accessible. The premises have facilities for the secure retention of records and an appropriate security system.

Staff have access to personal computers and communication systems. Foster carers files are stored on an upper landing, which is accessed via a small circular staircase. The service has undertake risk assessments in relation to accessing the files that are stored on the upper floor of the agency, a none slip floor on the steps is now in place.

The Kinship Care Team are based in Norman Grove, which is being developed into additional site. There is a provision of offices and the team are in the process of setting up a family room, for the use of meetings with foster carers and the young people.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The agency fostering services are financially viable and appropriate and timely payments are made to foster carers.

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

The agency ensures it is financially viable at all times and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Tower Hamlets Fostering Service is a financially viable Local Authority service. Procedures exist to manage situations of financial crisis. Regulations and guidelines imposed upon Local Authorities are complied with.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

The financial processes/systems of the agency are properly operated and maintained in accordance with sound and appropriate accounting standards and practice.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The service has financial arrangements for control and supervision of its financial affairs and powers. Budgets are regularly monitored and reviewed. The Access to Resources Team collates management information in relation to placement costs, trends and profiles of children in foster care and foster carers.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

Each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover the full cost of caring for each child or young person placed with him or her. Payments are made promptly and at the agreed time. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

There is guidance in place with regards to finance and payments to foster carers (section 9). The allowances are reviewed annually and are raised at least in line with inflation. Foster carers are also reimbursed –on provision of receipts for additional expenses as agreed by the authority. Carers spoken to during the inspection confirmed this.

In October 2003 carers received between a 10%-48% raise in allowances, this was to bring carers in line with each other as there were large differences between carer allowances for babies in comparison to older young people. The allowances include provision of clothing and travel. Carers can also claim £400.00 per young person per year towards a holiday and receive between £100.00-£150.00 for birthdays dependant on the age of the young person in addition to an additional £150.00 per year for annual religious festivals, this is paid in December unless another time if nominated by the carer.

As previously stated in standards 17 and 23 carers also receive additional payment once they have achieved the NVQ Level 3, this payment was introduced following consultation with carers. Payments are generally paid by the BACS system, however the carers were also given the opportunity to remain on the cheque system if they so wished.

As previously stated in standard 21 carers can also receive a discretionary payment to assist with childcare provision, this is paid at £3.50 per hour.

Guidance is also given to foster carers with regards to pocket money allowances

The administration system is computerised and well structured which ensures that payments are made promptly. All the carers spoken to during the inspection stated that they were always paid promptly.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that 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 in foster care.

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

Fostering panels have clear written policies and procedures, which are implemented in practice, about the handling of their functions.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Due to the time restrictions for this inspection the panel was not observed.

The fostering panel has clear written procedures in relation to the purpose, membership and decision-making. These applied from January 2004. The decision maker in Tower Hamlets is the Head of Children's Services.

Minutes were seen from November 03 with panel papers which were presented to the December 03 panel. The inspector was satisfied that the foster panels are organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of young people in foster care.

The fostering panel has access to medical, educational, legal and child care expertise. The panel includes independent members in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The panel has an Independent Chair who has over twenty years experience in adoption and experience of chairing fostering and adoption panels in other organisations. The inspector was informed that all members have CRB checks completed.

Training for panel members is provided in the form of two half-day workshops. The aim is to provide consistency of practice and to ensure that decisions are child focused. The training department also facilitates Fostering Panel members' information sessions, which are, provided at pre arranged times on panel dates.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangement recognises that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

Where a fostering service provides short-term breaks for children in foster care, they have policies and procedures, implemented in practice, to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Tower Hamlets provide short break foster placements, which used to be known as respite care. These carers are managed within the Fostering Development Team. Short-term breaks are provided for children in need who do not have significant disabilities and whose families require additional social work involvement from locality based teams. No single placement exceeds four continuous weeks and the total duration of placements in the twelve-month period does not exceed one hundred and twenty days. Policies and procedures are in place in relation to the provision of short breaks services. The arrangements specifically recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.	
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Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- Local authority fostering services' policies and procedures for assessing, approving, supporting and training foster carers recognise the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friends as carers.

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

These standards are all relevant to carers who are family and friends of the child, but there is recognition of the particular relationship and position of family and friend carers.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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4

The Kinship Care Team has been set up to meet the needs of children placed with 'their kin'. There are currently 18 carers placed within the team. Tower Hamlets are aware that the needs of kinship carers are different and have also highlighted the potential of increasing the service so that more looked after young people stay within their family network. The team was set up in October 2003. In October 2003 a consultation exercise was commissioned with an aim to review and develop the teams approach to service delivery, the report raised issues that kinship carers had such as social workers being referred to as Link Workers, training issues and communication concerns. An away day for staff was also set up to develop key objectives.

The team provides a range of assessments and support to the following carers:

- Support and Assessment of friends and family foster carers.
- Support and Advice to carers receiving residence order allowances
- Support and Advice to carers of children living in the borough and are unable to live with their birth parents.

These services are being implemented over the coming months with the hope that the team will be fully operational in April 2004.

The premises included a family room for both carers and young people placed. Furniture had been ordered but was not in place at the time of inspection. The inspector was informed that there would be an independent telephone line for carers use.

The team is made up of the manager, two social workers, two support workers and an administrator. The support worker role is to support and co work with the social workers as the need arises. Through discussion with staff the inspector was `satisfied that they were fully aware of their role and the direction in which the team was aiming in its first year.

The manager has adapted policies and procedures to meet the needs of the team taking into account the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Core training remains essential with additional workshops such as Grandparents plus, family group conferences and working with family Support Networks.

The inspector was satisfied that the local authority is sensitive to pre- existing relationships;

this was noted through the tracking of one case that is to be presented to the March panel. Evidence was seen of support being given through the re assessment process and decisions were clearly recorded.

There is a procedure set up withy regards to emergency placements under regulation 38 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. This includes a '*viability*' assessment, which the manager can authorise a placement up to six weeks. There is clear guidance with regards to the assessment process, presentation to panel and the annual reviews.

The team have set up an evaluation process and the intent is that this will review the strategies for the next annual plan.

The agency is commended for this work and for the commitment to this specialist area within the fostering service.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____
Date _____

D.1 Registered Person's or Responsible Local Authority Manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 3rd to the 16th February 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

Action taken by the NCSC in response to the provider's comments:

Amendments to the report were necessary	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate	<input type="checkbox"/> YES

Note:

In instances where there is a major difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider responsible Local Authority fostering service Manager both views will be made available on request to the Area Office.

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 30th March 2004, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

Status of the Provider's Action Plan at time of publication of the final inspection report:

Action plan was required	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Action plan was received at the point of publication	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
Provider has declined to provide an action plan	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
Other: <enter details here>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Public reports

It should be noted that all NCSC inspection reports are public documents. Reports on children's homes are only obtainable on personal application to NCSC offices.

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

Registered Person's or responsible Local Authority Manager's statement of agreement/comments: Please complete the relevant section that applies.

D.3.1 I _____ of _____ confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of _____ am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Note: In instance where there is a profound difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider both views will be reported. Please attach any extra pages, as applicable.