

Item No. 8	Classification: Open	Date: 25/07/07	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Outcome of Southwark's Annual Fostering Service Inspection	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Strategic Director of Children's Services	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Committee receive this report on the outcome of the Annual Fostering Service Inspection.
2. The Committee agree the Action Plan (Appendix 1) arising from the inspection.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. Local Authority Fostering Services are subject to an annual inspection, by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Fostering Services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Children Act, as amended.
4. The Local Authority must comply with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The Fostering Service is also expected to fully meet the National Minimum Standards. Compliance with these standards forms the basis for judgements by the CSCI in relation to notices to the Local Authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act about the quality of the Fostering Service that has been inspected.
5. In response to the Children Act 2004, CSCI has compiled the national minimum standards for children's services under the five ECM outcomes for reporting purposes. A further section on Management has been created to cover those areas that may impact on the outcomes.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

6. There are a total of 32 National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, which focus on achievable outcomes for children and young people and are broken down into a range of sections against which the Local Authority is judged. Of the 19 standards that received a rating, the service received a 4 (standard exceeded - commendable) in 5 areas, a 3 (standard met, no shortfalls) in 10 areas, and a 2 (standard almost met - minor shortfalls) in 4 areas. Under the 5 outcomes the service received the following judgments:

Being Healthy	- Excellent
Staying Safe	- Good
Enjoying and Achieving	- Excellent
Making a Positive Contribution	- Good

7. The Inspectors found that the service had continued to perform well and highlighted the following areas:
- Children were satisfied with carers and service received; they received advice about being healthy and when they felt unwell; they felt cared for and safe.
 - Children received help to achieve, take part in leisure activities, were consulted and helped to make decisions that enabled them to maintain contact with family and friends;
 - The service provided high quality support to carers and had an emphasis on the educational, health and leisure needs of children;
 - Specialist social workers provided intensive support to carers and the health and mental health teams had directly benefited children;
 - The positive impact of the education team having gone to carers' houses to support children's educational needs;
 - Good joint working with health, education and other professionals to ensure CLA have the same opportunities as all children in the borough;
 - The experienced Panel, which was effectively chaired and the experienced social work team; and
 - That the Executive Member for Children's Services and Education took an active role.
8. Overall it was felt to be a well-managed service, which is strongly committed to raising standards. There was evidence of progress and the improvements that the service manager had attained in some very challenging circumstances (availability of resources). There was also acknowledgement of the service manager's commitment, skills and achievement.
9. The Inspectors stressed that the areas for improvement should be viewed within the context of what is a good service. Key areas for consideration included:
- The top priority is to recruit new carers. There were currently 200 carers with the potential to place 400 children;
 - The service was seen to be operating at optimum capacity and there were some indications that it had reached its ceiling. There was some concern as to how services could continue to meet demand, how priorities were set and how new developments could be well acted upon within the available resources;
 - The fact that young people wanted more clarity about what their money allowances were and what these should include; and
 - There was a need to improve administrative systems, particularly on the outcomes of checks.

Policy implications

10. The continued development and improvement of the Fostering Service is a key component in achieving better outcomes for children who are looked after by the Council. The requirement to have an effective fostering service has been highlighted in the recently published Government White Paper, "Care Matters", which emphasises the importance of improving foster care standards. Better outcomes for children looked after is a priority in the Children and Young People

Plan and the strengthening of the service is one of our main strategies to reduce expenditure on children's placements in the private and voluntary sector.

Community Impact Statement

11. The Fostering Service has been successful in recruiting carers who reflect the diverse nature of Southwark's population. While the majority of children and young people can be placed with carers from the same ethnic background, the inspection found that there was some evidence of trans-racial and trans-cultural placements. However, they also found that many of these trans-racial and trans-cultural placements had been effective in supporting the needs of young people. The service is mindful of the importance of achieving a good match of ethnicity and culture and will continue to monitor performance in this area to achieve the best possible outcomes for children looked after.

Resource implications

12. There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report although the inspectors highlighted the fact that the service was operating to capacity, and that this might impede its ability to grow to meet anticipated demand. This issue will be kept under review, and should additional resource issues emerge, they will be reported back to this committee.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Inspection Report Southwark Fostering	Children's Services Department, Mabel Goldwin House, 49 Grange Walk, London, SE1 3DY	Rory Patterson 020 7525 3846

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Fostering Inspection Action Plan 2007

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Romi Bowen, Strategic Director of Children's Services
Report Author	Rory Patterson, Assistant Director: Specialist Children's Services and Safeguarding
Version	Final

Dated	17/07/07	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Director of Legal and Democratic Services	No	No
Director of Finance	No	No
List other officers here		
Executive Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional/Community Council/Scrutiny Team	17/07/07	