1. Summary and Summary of the Report

1.1 This report informs the CYP Select Committee of the outcome of the inspection carried out by Ofsted of the Fostering Service.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The CYP Select Committee is asked to note the results of the inspection of the fostering service by Ofsted as detailed in the inspection report attached.

3. Policy Context

3.1 The purpose of an Ofsted inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

3.2 The legal basis for conducting inspections of Fostering Services, both Council run and Agency Foster Care is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the associated Fostering (England) Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2011.

4. Background

4.1 The inspection was conducted between 22\textsuperscript{nd} and 25\textsuperscript{th} January 2013. This is part of the regulatory and inspection regime Ofsted is required to conduct of Local Authority fostering services. The London Borough of Lewisham received two weeks notice of the inspection during which time the inspectors requested several documents and reports to be sent to them so they could read in preparation for the on-site inspection.

4.2 A range of documents and reports were made available for the start of the inspection on 22\textsuperscript{nd} January 2013 in 12 large files reflecting the Fostering (England) Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards 2011. Several other documents were also provided throughout the week as and when the inspectors requested additional information.

4.3 The four day inspection consisted of a Lead Ofsted Inspector and an Her Majesty’s Inspector. The process of the inspection involved 7 meetings and/or telephone calls with individuals and 12 focus groups with Looked After Children, Children in Care Council, foster carers, independent chair of the fostering panel and officers.
4.4 In reaching judgements of the performance of the Fostering Service the inspectors graded in four different areas. These are ‘outcomes for children and young people; quality of service; safeguarding children and young people; as well as leadership and management’. The inspectors then provided an overall grade for the effectiveness of the fostering service. The following outlines the inspection judgements and what these mean:

- **Outstanding**: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
- **Good**: a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements.
- **Adequate**: a service that only meets minimum requirements.
- **Inadequate**: a service that does not meet minimum requirements.

4.5 The Council’s Fostering Service was awarded an overall ‘Good’, one ‘Outstanding’ and three ‘Good’. The table below sets out the different areas subjected to inspection judgements and the grading against them:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Effectiveness</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes for Children &amp; Young People</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Service</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safeguarding Children &amp; Young People</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership &amp; Management</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6 Although the inspection was conducted at the end of January 2013, the report was published on the Ofsted Website in March.

4.7 The Director of Children’s Social Care submitted written feedback to Ofsted on 8 February 2013 and again on 5 March 2013 outlining our concerns about the conduct of this particular inspection. Our concerns were primarily that the new Inspection Framework was not followed properly in that no specific children’s cases were examined, nor were foster carer records examined. The progress made by the Fostering Service and the positive comments from young people, foster carers, social workers, independent reviewing officers, parents, and the Fostering Panel were also not, in our view, well reflected.

There were several telephone discussions about the concerns between the Director and Ofsted culminating with one held on 26 April with the Investigating Officer.

4.8 We received the Outcomes letter relating to our complaint from Ofsted on 26 May 2013. The letter informed us that Ofsted had only upheld one aspect of our concerns in relation to delays in responding to initial comments.

4.9 Notwithstanding the complaint we submitted, Inspectors were impressed by many aspects of our in house foster care, such as the involvement of children and young people notably the Children in Care Council, the commitment and competence of Lewisham foster carers, Supervising Social Workers, Independent Reviewing Officers and other front line children’s social workers. Inspectors were equally impressed by leadership and management, specifically that the fostering service is closely monitored and subjected to regular audits by the senior management team and the Corporate Parenting Group whom the inspectors commented that has a substantial commitment to meeting the needs of Looked After Children. The report is a credit to foster carers and their Supervising Social Workers. Foster Carers work tirelessly, striving to achieve high standards in the care they provide for children and young people. The full report of ten pages is attached for reference at Appendix 1.

5. **Recommendations arising from the inspection**

5.1 There were two recommendations under ‘Areas for Improvement’ and these are:
To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s): ensure that the service implements an effective strategy to ensure sufficient foster carers to be responsive to current and predicted future demands on the service. Specifically, one that ensures that sibling groups will not be separated unnecessarily.

Lewisham’s response and action: The strategy for the recruitment of foster carers focuses on the urgent need for foster carers who have the personal capacity and accommodation to care for sibling groups, teenagers as well as parent and child as these are our particular challenges. The leaflet drops throughout the borough and surrounding boroughs have stated this expectation since beginning of the year. The current bus campaign which has been running over the last few months uses images and text which clearly demonstrate this.

To ensure that children's safety and welfare is promoted in all fostering placements. Specifically, that assessments of ‘back up’ carers are sufficiently thorough to allow the fostering service to properly satisfy itself about their suitability to undertake the fostering role.

Lewisham's response and action: We have always satisfied ourselves as to the suitability of ‘Back Up’ carers. The assessments undertaken of such individuals are more rigorous than is the case in other organisations, both Local Authorities and the Independent Fostering Agencies. We have since produced a more comprehensive policy and procedure to evidence this approach.

Overall, the report is positive and there are no regulatory recommendations from this inspection.

6 Financial Implications

6.1 There are no financial implications from this report as the Ofsted report recommendations are being implemented within the existing resources in the children's social care budget.

7 Legal Implications

7.1 This inspections was conducted under the Care Standards Act 2000; Children Act 1989; Children Act 2004; Fostering (England) Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards 2011.

8 Equalities Implications

8.1 There are no direct equalities implications from this report.

9 Crime and disorder Implications

9.1 There are no direct or indirect Crime and Disorder implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS


If there are any queries on this report, please contact Brendah Malahleka on 0208 314 8730.