



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Somerset County Council

**Children & Young People's Directorate
County Hall
Taunton
Somerset
TA1 4DY**

Lead Inspector
Deborah Turner

Announced Inspection
13th – 27th February 2006 09:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Somerset County Council
Address	Children & Young People's Directorate County Hall Taunton Somerset TA1 4DY
Telephone number	01823 335285
Fax number	01823 357900
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Somerset County Council Children & Young People's Directorate
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service
No. of places registered (if applicable)	0
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 29th March 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Somerset County Council fostering service is part of the Children and Young People's Directorate and as such is governed by the policies and procedures, which apply to the County Council. The Somerset County Council fostering service provides the following services for children and young people aged between 0 to 18 years in the Somerset area:

- ❖ Time limited placements - which include emergency and ongoing placements.
- ❖ Shared Care and Short Break - offers shared care and short term breaks for children with disabilities.
- ❖ Respite Care - offers short term breaks to children cared for by other foster carers.
- ❖ Long term placements - where adoption is not feasible.
- ❖ Home Based Care - which applies to children with emotional and behavioural problems who require additional time, effort and skilled carers.
- ❖ Friends and Families - this applies to kin-ship and close friends of the family fostering placements.

A total of 227 children and young people were placed with the service at the time of the inspection, of which 118 were boys and 109 girls.

SUMMARY

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

The following abbreviations have been used within the body of this report:

LAC (Looked after children).
NMS (National Minimum Standards).
CLA (Children Looked After).
EDT (Emergency Duty Team).

The Inspectors used 'case tracking methodology' which involved the examination of records/documents, discussion with the young people and evidence in relation to young people to determine how the National Minimum Standards worked for them in practice.

Fifteen young people and ten foster carers were case tracked during this inspection.

Inspectors interviewed a total of eight members of the fostering service social work staff. This included the manager of the service, team leaders unqualified and qualified resource staff.

A total of ten foster carers were interviewed including carers who offer a shared care short break service for disabled children. One parent using the shared care service was also interviewed.

Fifteen children using the service were case tracked. Eleven children who were able to give verbal feedback about the service met the inspectors.

Others interviewed as part of this inspection included:

- The chair of the foster panel.
- The nurse practitioner for children and young people looked after.
- The policy and performance manager.
- A team leader from Team 8.
- The access manager for education.
- The staff development officer.

What the service does well:

The fostering service was making efforts to ensure that in line with Government initiatives 'Healthy Care Partnership' actions were being taken forward and embedded into mainstream looked after children work practices.

The work of the foster panels was considered to be worthy of commendation.

Good efforts were being made to support looked after children/young people in crisis and to provide opportunities and information for them to access a range of individual support networks. Foster carers and young people especially valued the contribution of Team 8. Comments like '*Team 8 is brilliant*' '*Team 8 is doing a great job of supporting the lad*' were received from foster carers.

Somerset County Council had recognised the need to make strategic efforts to support looked after children/young people in education. A number of initiatives were planned. The outcome of these will be measured at the next inspection of this service.

Good evidence was provided across the service about how the views and opinions of the children and young people were being taken forward and influencing policy changes and amendments.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Matching practice was generally of a high standard and demonstrated real improvement upon the previous year.

Foster carers allowances had been increased in line with the Fostering Network guidance.

The young person's guide now contained information concerning the right to access records. Foster carers had also been informed in writing about the procedure for any young person requesting access to their records.

What they could do better:

The fostering service should ensure that all foster carers receive a placement agreement that includes the details concerning medical consent.

In order to fully comply with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 two written references must be obtained for all staff appointments within the fostering service.

Although it was clear from the files examined and the inspectors observation of panel that foster carers reviews were carried out in line with the guidance of NMS. There is a need to ensure that these high standards are being maintained across the whole service.

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

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

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Being Healthy

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s): 12

All efforts were being made by the fostering service to ensure that children placed with their foster carers continue to receive any medical treatment or specialist care they might require. However, the provision of medical consent details to foster carers at the start of any placement needs to be improved.

EVIDENCE:

There was a designated Looked After Children (LAC) health care professional (Nurse) who was responsible for coordinating the initial health assessment by a medical practitioner of all children brought into the care of Somerset County Council. This included the annual health assessment review for children in foster care. Foster carers should receive a copy of this health assessment. Not all carers interviewed could recall receiving this information. Others had been sent copies.

For children under the age of five health assessments were completed 6 monthly. The LAC nurse had a role in ensuring that medical information about children and young people looked after was shared with all relevant and appropriate health professionals. For younger children links were being maintained with health care professionals such as the child's health visitor.

The LAC nurse could if appropriate refer individual children to a specialist paediatrician and other departments for example, the mental health teams and drug services such as, 'On The Level' for substance misuse and addiction. It was reported that in general most matters were being dealt with by the young person's own GP.

The LAC nurse will if requested visit foster carers at home and support them in health promotion, such as helping a young person to give up smoking and promoting healthy eating/diet options.

The policy and performance manager also had a strategic overview of health care for children looked after and in driving forward change to ensure positive outcomes for children looked after.

Somerset County Council had been one of five Local Authorities to pilot the 'Healthy Care Partnership', a time-limited working group. 'Healthy Care Partnership' actions were being taken forward and embedded into mainstream looked after children work practices. Using the Healthy Care Partnership actions and following this pilot, work has continued to develop services such as access to NHS dentists within their immediate locality, and individual health plans for all children looked after, which should be reviewed annually.

In November 2005 the Local Authority provided a joint training event for residential care staff and foster carers. The Healthy Care Partnership facilitated this.

Workshops included:

- Sexual Health.
- Educational Achievement.
- Promoting the health of looked after children.
- Emotional health and wellbeing.

Messages from looked after children; young people and care leavers were shared with participants at the training event, and it was hoped that this will continue to influence practice developments within the fostering service and looked after children and young peoples services as a whole.

Significantly following comments from looked after children, young people and care leavers about confidentiality in medical matters, the authority's sexual health policy had been revised.

All foster carers were asked if they had received essential medical information about the child/young person in their care. They were asked if they had received and signed a written foster placement agreement detailing authorisation and information concerning consent to emergency treatment, first aid and non-urgent medical treatment for the child/young person/s in their care.

Some of the foster carers interviewed and in particular those with experience in foster care, who were more familiar with the LAC paperwork were clear whether they had received consent information from the child's placing social worker. However, some foster carers were unsure what this document was and were unable to find any copy of this. Two foster carers were clear that they had not been provided with a copy of the information concerning consent to medical treatment for the child/young person/s in their care.

Inspectors also noted on some files examined that the child/young person's social worker had not signed the foster placement agreement.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

6, 8, 9, 15 and 30

The fostering service makes available foster carers who provide safe and nurturing environments. Careful matching processes had been undertaken by the fostering service. The notice of exemption required further input.

The fostering service aims to provide proper protection for children through training and information sharing. Staff vetting procedures require some review.

The foster panel membership had a range of policies and procedures for guidance. The functions and remit of the panel members was understood. The panel functioning was well managed, prepared and thorough in its deliberations.

EVIDENCE:

The inspectors visited 9 foster carers at home. Foster carers were asked if their home had been checked by the fostering service for safety. All foster carers stated that they had had safety checks undertaken and that these were repeated annually in preparation for their annual review. One foster carers review and health and safety check was overdue.

Some children/young people who met the inspectors were happy to show the inspectors their individual bedrooms. With encouragement from the foster carers, bedrooms had been personalised and made individual by the children and young people. Some children and young people were also keen to show the inspectors their toys and games and demonstrate how some of these worked.

It was noted from previous panel minutes that where any hazard had been identified by the fostering service either prior to approval or during an annual review, that foster carers had been required to take steps to remove or minimise this.

For younger children car safety equipment had been provided by the fostering service.

As part of the inspection one inspector attended the Foster panel meeting held on 02.02.06.

Observation was that in order to provide long-term placements for some children and young people and to ensure that the best interest of the child were being met, a great deal of preparatory work had been undertaken jointly by both the children/s social worker and the fostering resource social worker. All members of the panel gave consideration to the information provided and were asked by the panel chair to make comment on their recommendations concerning the proposed matching of for long term placements.

During the interviews with foster carers inspectors asked about planning and matching of children to the foster carers. Some children and young people had been placed with a foster carer in an emergency and therefore planning before the placement had not been possible. The majority of the emergency placements had been made to experienced foster carers who were identified by the service as able to provide this level of support to a child/young person in crisis.

Records were maintained of any amendment or exemption notice issued to a foster carer who had exceeded three children/young people in placement or taken a child/young person outside their category of approval. Exemption notices are required for any foster carers exceeding three children/young people in placement. The notices seen on files examined did not include all the details of all the children in placement.

Good practice was noted in regard to foster carers who had taken any placement outside their approval status. A written variation notice was being sent to these carers.

Other foster carers stated that they had had a planned and phased introduction to the child/young person and that this had been helpful to both parties. In some files matching reports were seen. This was good practice.

Some foster carers were familiar with the principles of safe caring and some foster carers had developed a family safe care guide.

Training of foster carers including child protection and safeguarding children training is discussed within the section of this report '**Management**' Foster carers were clear about their role in terms of sanctions for the children/young people in their care. All foster carers had received and signed a 'Foster Care Agreement' within this it is stipulated that a foster carers **must not** administer any form of corporal punishment to a child in their care.

Information and policy guidance concerning bullying was available to staff and foster carers. Carers who met inspectors were aware that a designated teacher existed in all schools for looked after children and that they could liaise with that teacher if the child/young person in their care was being harassed or bullied. See section '**Enjoying and Achieving**' to see the findings included in the research undertaken by Barnardos '**Include Me In**' regarding bullying.

Inspectors examined the personnel records for some staff employed within the fostering service. It was noted that in some files examined that where a member of staff was already employed by the Local Authority and had applied for a position within the fostering service, only one reference had been obtained. The inspectors were informed that this was policy within the Local Authority.

An inspector attended and observed the business of the foster panel meeting held on 02.02.06, and interviewed the chair of the panel. The minutes of the panel meetings held over the last six months were examined. The panel had an independent chairperson who had applied for the post via an external advertisement. It was reported that panel members have had CRB checks completed. Medical advice was available to panels.

All panel members were introduced to attendees and the chair of the meeting was observed to clarify points with social workers for the children and fosters carers, throughout the hearing of review and matching information. All members were able to ask further questions, and in concluding and reaching a final recommendation about the case before them were requested to give a reason to all in attendance for their individual recommendation. All decisions were formally recorded. The chair also referred to the panel advisor for clarity and guidance. Debate and collaborate working with all members input being considered and valued was observed.

Feedback was requested from panel members about the quality of information written and verbal presented by social workers to panel. It was reported that

feedback was sent to social workers. The panel chair hoped that this feedback to staff was positive and influenced ongoing improvements in the quality of report writing and presentations to panel. Social work staff were also sent feedback forms and asked to comment on their experience of attending panel.

The panel chair was asked to comment on the range of foster carers available to the authority in terms of meeting the needs of children. The panel chair stated that she felt that there was a recognised need to recruit more foster carers; although currently those available within the service were considered as representative of the population of Somerset and offered a range of skills and life experiences for children in need of a placement.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.(NMS 31)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

7, 13 and 31

The fostering service works to provide placements that recognise the children's individual skills, talents and abilities, values and promotes equality. Foster carers and young people especially valued the contribution of Team 8.

Significant work in being done to improve the educational outcomes for looked after children in Somerset. The educational needs of the children were being given value by foster carers although some felt that they required more support from and cohesive working with the children's services and education departments.

The shared care and short break services for disabled children were found to be working well in supporting parents.

EVIDENCE:

Somerset is a rural county that consists of a predominantly white British population. However, it was recognised by staff interviewed that this does not mean that individual children and young people's heritage and cultural identity is not considered in terms of matching placements.

It was reported that to raise awareness of sexuality, religion, equality and disability, that some work has been done individually and in groups with foster carers. It was difficult to assess accurately the take up of training by foster

carers as they did not keep individual training portfolios. See '**Management**' re training of foster carers.

Foster carers were aware that the children/young people in their care often needed encouragement and support to achieve their individual potential and rebuild feelings of value and self worth. Foster carers were also keen to ensure that the child/young person/s in their care received equal access to opportunities to develop individual talents and abilities.

Some foster carers were able to give examples of how they had worked collaboratively with other agencies to support the young person in their care through difficult times. Examples were working with Team 8 to avoid placement breakdown and support the individual child/young person through a personal crisis.

Team 8 is accessible to children/young people from the age of 10 –16. A referral to team 8 is made via a social worker. A team 8 worker will be allocated to an individual child/young person for a fixed time period not exceeding 6 weeks, to work with a child/young person on a one to one basis. The aim of the service is to support and prevent placement breakdown and to assist in reducing the number of placement changes a young person might otherwise experience without this intervention. The young person is able to read the content of their referral and therefore understand why the support has been requested. The allocated worker will then with the support of the young person, and if appropriate the foster carers create an action plan. Workers have access to individual work sheets to support working on issues such as: anger management, problem solving and building self-esteem. The Team 8 philosophy is based on a holistic approach to problem solving for the young person. Team 8 staff do not have to be qualified social workers. The inspector met a team leader from Team 8 who thought that this had helped some young people to relate better to the intervention worker. Following work with Team 8 further referrals can be made to other supporting agencies such as 'STAR' (Somerset Trust for Art and recreation), On The Level, Connexions, Breaking The Cycle and Promise. Where it is recognised that a specialist worker is required this can be dealt with, for example a mental health practitioner or drug and alcohol worker.

Team 8 will also work with foster carers on issues such as boundary setting, risk management and setting house social rules.

The inspector met some young people who had received support from Team 8 and also Promise (Mentoring service). The child/young person and their foster carers welcomed the value of the support they had or were still receiving.

The educational achievements of children looked after was being monitored and strategies were in place to provide all children looked after with a range of

educational support networks, and to improve educational outcomes for children looked after.

An inspector met with the Access Manager from the children looked after education department. The education team is now part of the Local Authority's Children and Young People's Directorate and reports directly into children's services, therefore creating a countywide information link at a strategic level. The Access Manager also sat on the foster panel and could through this role identify where some children/young people might benefit from additional input. It was reported that all schools had a dedicated LAC teacher who received specific training for this role. It was reported that training is also being provided to school governors about the role of LAC teachers.

Following an audit of strengths and needs in 2005 into which foster carers had input, funding had been secured to provide a number of higher-level teaching assistants specifically for children looked after. These staff will have a role in heightening the awareness of all education and social care staff to the needs of looked after children and the effect being looked after might have on educational achievement/attainment. They will deliver a teaching service directly to some students whilst coordinating alternative education arrangements for others. These staff will have a hot desk within area teams so that they can link directly with and be familiar to social work staff for children looked after.

Training was due to commence on the implementation of an improved PEP (Personal Education Plan) and social work staff were to attend this alongside foster carers and education staff. One member of the fostering resource staff interviewed by inspectors had attended this training and felt that this had been a positive experience.

The inspector was informed that further support for foster carers included access to funding for children/young people who might need to move education following placement. This was described as a 'short term one off fund' that helped schools in the early stage of receiving a child therefore reducing the barriers to access and support, and providing a smooth transition from one school to the next. There is a children looked after educational helpline, staffed by education department staff. Some foster carers had an awareness of this service, in particular Home Based Carers, but not all foster carers knew this support was available. However, it was reported that this information had been widely published.

One foster carer felt that they had not been fully supported by the social worker for their child or the education department in securing an educational assessment. Although this had since been carried out, the foster carers felt that the delay in receiving this support had been stressful and unhelpful to them and their individual child.

It was reported that following a piece of research undertaken by Barnardos '**Include Me In**' completed in consultation with looked after children, that the children looked after service plan had an appendix added specifically about access to library services.

It was stated that some children returning to education may need to do this in a phased way, it was reported that a virtual classroom has been designed that children looked after could also access. The description of this was that the child/young person would attend the library as a venue or register on line for lessons from a home computer. This is also aimed at supporting the foster carers who have young people in their care who for any reason cannot attend school.

Also noted within the Barnardos '**Include Me In**' several references were made to comments from children/young people about bullying and the report stated that '*No bullying*' was a big message from all the young people consulted. In response to the question 'What stops you learning' bullying was highlighted twice by the young people consulted.

Inspectors met with approved foster carers for children with disabilities who receive a short break shared care service. One carer had not received regular support from her fostering service resource worker or had an annual review completed.

There was a feeling of isolation expressed by this foster carer and of not feeling fully informed. The parent of a child receiving shared care was positive about the benefits to her child and had developed a good working relationship with the carer. In describing the carers for her child, mum had said '*they are the best*'.

As the parent she had remained the key person and had been involved in stating how her child should be cared for during periods of shared care. Consistent boundaries were being agreed and work was continuing to maintain these at home and at the carer's house.

However, communication links between all agency workers involved in the care of and support of the parent and child were not always satisfactory and information was not being shared in one situation between key professionals in particular with the care manager for the parent.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

10 and 11

Children were being supported to maintain family contact as agreed by the placing authority.

The fostering service makes significant efforts to secure the views of the children in their care. It was recognised that ongoing development in this area forms part of the services continual growth.

EVIDENCE:

In interviews with foster carers it was established that every effort was made to maintain agreed contact arrangements for children and young people.

The child's wishes were being taken in to account and where they had expressed a wish not to meet certain family members or friends this was respected. Care plans were not always in place but carers were fully aware of any restrictions for contact and had been supported by the staff of the fostering service to maintain contact for the children in their care.

Where contact difficulties had arisen it was reported that support had been provided both to the child/young person and the foster carers. Some carers did maintain records of significant events including details of contact visits.

The fostering service requested that the social workers for children sent out to them a copy of the inspection questionnaire for children/young people. The inspectors had 3 children's questionnaires returned. All children under 10 and 25 named children were excluded from the survey. However, this remains

a very low number of returns. It is therefore considered of questionable value to use this as a measure of the satisfaction or otherwise of the service. However, it has demonstrated some of the difficulties the authority might experience in engaging young people in quality monitoring.

The inspectors received information and evidence of consultation with young people from attending the foster panel and from meeting a variety of staff Involved in the care of children looked after and care leavers.

For example children/young people were asked to comment on their current and past placement through their own review process and when a foster carers annual review was due. Young people and care leavers were involved in the Healthy Care Partnership and consulted about health issues for children in public care. Young people had attended multi agency Healthy Care Partnership conferences and answered questions. As a result of consultation policy and procedures concerning overnight stays were re-issued to all field staff. Young people were involved in developing a video for foster carers, which covers contact with family and friends, and staying healthy. It was reported that young people were now being asked to comment on the looked after children paperwork and the quality of leaflets and written information provided to them.

In conjunction with the Children's fund looked after children in the Mendip area were planning to get together during half term to feedback about being a child living in Mendip. It was planned that this information be fed back to team leaders/locality managers to inform them about the issues that the children felt affected them about living within this area of Somerset.

The inspectors asked the children and young people they met about making a complaint. Some had an awareness of the process they could use for this. However, only one young person could recall being given a complaint card.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

14 and 29

Good efforts were seen to be made to support young people in preparing to leave care.

Foster carers received agreed allowances and additional funding support where appropriate for the children in their care.

EVIDENCE:

A pathway plan for one young person was seen. The young person confirmed that she felt supported in the preparation for her eventually leaving care. Central to this had been maintaining her school placement in her home area and facilitating the maintenance of her friendship networks.

All foster carers interviewed had received an allowance increase following negotiations by the fostering service to bring the allowances within Somerset County Council in line with the Fostering Network recommended rates. Foster carers received annual updates on allowances payable, and were receiving additional funding for any equipment that the child/young person might need. Where very young children had been placed baby equipment had been supplied by the fostering service.

Foster carers confirmed that allowances were being paid on time and were usually accurate.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

NMS 18, 19 were no assessed.

The service has a statement of purpose and children's/young person's guide that meet current NMS. Some further consideration could be given to producing a guide in a format suitable for younger children, who may not be able to read unaided, and for different schemes.

Procedures exist that facilitate management overview of the quality and activity of the fostering service.

The management of the fostering service is undergoing change. A new post 'Group Manager Residential Fostering' had been established although not recruited to at the time of this inspection.

The provider had in place appropriate arrangements for the management of the service during this period of change.

There were procedures in place for the monitoring, control and development of the service.

Staff organisation and management systems were considered to be working well. However, it was established that shortfalls existed in regard to the supervision and annual review process for a shared care short break carer.

Staffing levels within the fostering service were satisfactory. Some staff vacancies existed.

Recruitment of foster carers was under review and remains an area in need of continuous monitoring and development.

Staff understood the organisational structures within which they work.

Measures are in place to support, supervise and assist foster carers personal development. Training attendance varied and some foster carers had not attended regular training updates.

Case records for the children receiving foster care were maintained to a satisfactory standard.

Administration systems exist that can capture and retain all information required by the Commission For Social Care Inspection. The premises used for the service are acceptable.

Financial management systems exist to ensure the viability and financial management of the service.

Standards existed to support the approval of family and friends as foster carers.

EVIDENCE:

The service has produced a statement of purpose. This was reviewed and updated December 2005. The majority of foster carers visited were aware of the existence of the statement of purpose. Staff interviewed had seen the statement of purpose and stated that they had a copy available for reference.

The children and young person's guide meets the requirements of the NMS and Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Additional information about access to records had been added to inform young people of their rights in this area. Some children and young people who met with the inspectors were able to recall having received a copy of this guide. Some of the younger children told the inspectors that they were not able to read the guide themselves but had been helped by their foster carer. The service has several different types of foster care for example: Home Based Carers, Shared Care and Short breaks for disabled children. The inspectors did not find information about these individual schemes contained within the children and young person's guide.

Some children told the inspectors that they regularly received a magazine called 'Who cares'. Another publication produced 'Top Talk' had looked after young people as editorial advisors. This is a Somerset County Council publication.

Inspectors were informed that the management of the fostering service was currently undergoing change and that a new manager with specific responsibility for the fostering service was to be appointed. This post will provide for the management of strategic planning, performance and policy within the fostering service.

For the purpose of this inspection the previous manager of the fostering service liaised with inspectors and undertook to facilitate the inspection.

Within the fostering service there were clear and defined levels of management responsibility and accountability. The staff interviewed understood the organisation and management structure within the service. Most foster carers were also aware of the management structure. Foster carers had been informed of the fees and allowances payable, some foster carers had been paid additional allowances for agreed expenses. A review of fee/allowances paid to foster carers had been undertaken since the last inspection of this service. All foster carers were being paid in line with the guidance of the Fostering Network.

Foster carers were required to declare any conflict of interest to the fostering manager.

Performance of the service was monitored by using a range of management and quality assurance methods. Throughout the process of this inspection it was noted how various departments and other agency professionals that had a link into children looked after services were working together and sharing research that would help to shape the future development of the fostering service.

In line with the guidance of the National Service Framework and Children Act 2004 the Somerset County Council had launched a revised methodology for producing Personal Education Plans (PEP) for children looked after. A working group that included looked after children and young people had produced this work. Training for staff had commenced. Other work included that undertaken with the Somerset Healthy Care Partnership mentioned earlier within this report.

Matters referred to and detailed within Schedule 7 Regulation 42 of The Fostering Service Regulations 2002 could be produced as requested by the inspectors throughout this inspection visit.

It was established that staff at all levels were receiving monthly one to one supervision from their immediate line manager. Staff indicated that they found supervision useful and supportive. Staff with a social work qualification were responsible for monitoring and supporting any work undertaken by unqualified support staff. Where applicable staff were asked to comment on the manageability of their caseloads. All staff felt that they were able to manage their current caseloads.

The files of all those foster carers interviewed by inspectors were examined for details of vetting, approval status, reviews and ongoing supervision records. With one exception carer supervision visits and annual reviews were being completed on time, and where any delay had occurred records were in place to clarify the reason for this. However, one carer had not had an allocated supporting social worker since May 2005 and had not received one to one supervision since October 2005. The last recorded annual review was dated April 2004. This carer, when interviewed, felt that she often did not receive information about the young person she cared for and was concerned that she had not been given a full medical history for the child.

Training take up by foster carers varied. Some foster carers interviewed had not attended training for some time and others were very keen to attend training. One foster carer had successfully completed an NVQ 3 In childcare. The foster carers interviewed by inspectors were not maintaining training portfolios.

As detailed within the body of this report help and advice services for foster carers for matters of health and education were made available. All eight

mainstream foster carers interviewed were asked if they were aware of the following services the results were:

Team 8	= 6 out of 8 aware
EDT	= 8 out of 8 aware
CLA Nurse	= 5 out of 8 aware
LAC Teachers	= 8 out of 8 aware
CLA Educational advice line	= 6 out of 8 aware

The fostering resource teams were made up of both qualified and unqualified social work staff. The current balance of staffing did not indicate any significant shortfalls for mainstream carers who were receiving monthly support from their supervising social worker. Staff interviewed stated that their current caseloads remained manageable. Staff had access to regular training updates. Staff's training portfolios were not examined as part of this inspection.

There was general consensus amongst staff at all levels that further recruitment of foster carers remained a priority for the department, and that there were specific pockets of need. The recruitment arrangement at the time of this inspection remained centralised, although line management arrangements were under review. In discussion with the fostering manager it was established that it had been recognised that the recruitment of foster carers required a new focus and that new ideas and arenas in which this might be done were being considered. In some areas specialist marketing personnel had been employed in order to achieve this new impetus. This idea had been considered by the fostering and adoption service. At the time of this inspection there remained arrangements for staff from local teams to visit prospective foster carers and give them an overview of the service. Within teams specialists existed who would complete the assessment process for any new foster carers. Fostering preparation-training courses were held around the county. Nine were held last year.

The local media and radio was used to advertise the service. There was reported to be marketing via large employers. Local authority staff had also received flyers in their wage packets from time to time. There were two major recruitment campaigns held in spring and autumn 2005. Intelligence and statistics were available to track the number of foster carers recruited and retiring. One area stated that there had been 75 initial enquiries received that were then forwarded to the central recruitment team. This had only resulted in 6 families being approved. Staff interviewed stated that they had not received feedback concerning the number of enquiries and final approvals being achieved. Although it was reported that team leaders receive monthly statistics about expressions of interest and drop out figures.

From the information provided to the Commission For Social Care Inspection approximately 46 foster carers were approved and 47 de-registered by mutual agreement during 2005.

Foster carers assessment and final approval details were checked as part of this inspection. 10 files were case tracked. All files contained the approval assessment details as required by the Commission For Social Care Inspection.

There were 'corporate' policies and procedures in place with regard to staff duties and responsibilities.

All staff interviewed by inspectors confirmed that they received regular and planned supervision from their immediate line manager. Staff confirmed that team meetings were held monthly and minutes of meetings were being recorded.

Foster carers confirmed that they received formal support from their allocated supervising social worker. Some carers were being encouraged to undertake training and others who found attending training events more difficult had been provided with videos and reading materials. A range of distance learning materials was being developed and would be offered to carers.

All carers had an awareness of the out of hours services and the emergency duty team.

Where an unqualified member of staff was allocated to support a foster carer this had been agreed by the foster carer and was being overseen by a qualified social worker. With the exception of one foster carer all those interviewed by inspectors were receiving monthly supervision from their allocated support worker. Foster carer's files contained records of visits made and detailed where an unannounced visit had taken place.

Foster carers confirmed that they had been issued with a foster carer agreement and handbook.

Foster carers were aware that they could raise concerns and complaints with their support worker and that there was a formal process for making complaints.

A total of Thirty-five placing officers returned their questionnaire to the Commission For Social Care Inspection. No placing officers had had cause to complain about the fostering service.

Twenty-six foster carers returned their questionnaire to the Commission For Social Care Inspection. Five had had cause to complain about the fostering service. Three foster carers stated that these complaints had been dealt with to their satisfaction. The remaining two stated that the complaint had been 'sorted' but provided no further feedback about their satisfaction.

The fostering service manager maintained an overview of all formal complaints received and the outcome of these.

Policies and procedures exist that safeguard vulnerable children and where any allegation made against a foster carer is received this would be fully investigated using these procedures. Foster carers can be formally deregistered in any circumstance where inappropriate conduct is proven.

The inspectors met with the staff development officer for foster carers. All newly approved foster carers complete the pre-approval training locally. This training covers topics such as health and safety, safe caring and child protection. Foster carers interviewed who had attended training events stated that they had found training useful. All foster carers confirmed that they received a training programme regularly.

Other training packages available included distance learning and other training materials that facilitate study at home. The Educare (home learning package) was launched about 4 years ago and had been completed by a number of foster carers. Following on from this initiative the inspectors were informed that a more advanced distanced learning package was under consideration and would be piloted by foster carers this year.

This distance-learning package already being used by other local authorities contained 4 core elements each taking between 6-10 hours to complete. This training requires that the supervising social worker look at, and sign the learning log for the carer during their supervision session.

It was reported that where individual foster carers require information and training materials specific to the child/young person in their care then materials were sourced and provided via their supervising social worker. Feedback about the quality and value of training was being recorded following training events. Specialist speakers and experienced carers were asked to deliver training.

Training needs were identified by a range of sources. It was reported that the NMS informed training, key drivers being things such as healthy care and healthy eating as promoted in schools. It was stated that information from lead practitioners such as the LAC nurse and mental health teams could inform training, and in particular training about behaviours that challenge, and issues such as attachment and trauma.

Discussion took place concerning the promotion of safe caring, it was reported that work was underway to inform all foster carers of the need to develop an individual household safe care policy.

The majority of foster carers visited had not maintained a training portfolio and some had not attended any training during the last year. The training department had data available to track the take up of training by area.

A total of fifteen-children/young person's case files were examined. All files were organised in an agreed style. Children and young people had been informed via the children/young person's guide that they had case files and that they had the right to access these and read any information recorded. It was reported that a letter had been sent to all carers informing them that the young person in their care could access their care records via their social worker.

All foster carers visited were asked if they had been informed why the child/young person was being placed with them. All foster carers had received some information concerning the child/young person and why they required a placement. Information concerning the legal status of the child and duration of the placement was not always provided immediately, but had been provided within acceptable timescales. It was noted that some foster carers had not been provided with a copy of the child/young person's placement agreement.

Life story work training had not been formally provided to foster carers. However, a number of foster carers were helping the children/young people in their care to maintain photograph albums and save other significant memorabilia. Foster carers had been provided with a diary to record significant information and all had an awareness of the need to report significant incidents.

There are appropriate administration systems in place. Records were stored securely, with computer records password protected. Information and administration systems exist that could provide information in accordance with NMS 25. The premises used for the purpose of this service were satisfactory. The local authority was subject to financial scrutiny by central government and had in place appropriate financial auditing systems.

There are arrangements in place to facilitate the placement of children/young people with family members (kinship). These arrangements meant that fostering allowance could be paid, social work support provided for both the carer and the child/young person. Appropriate vetting procedures existed and had been applied to the kinship carer interviewed by inspectors. Training opportunities were provided for kinship carers. The service had ensured that these carers were being afforded the same support as non family members approved as carers.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	X
6	3
8	2
9	3
15	2
30	4

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

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	4

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

No

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS15	20 Sch. 1	Two written references must be obtained for all staff appointed to any position within the fostering service.	31/03/06
2	FS16	29 (2)	Annual review of foster carers must be maintained within all areas of the service.	31/03/06
3	FS12	34 & 17 (3b) Sch. 6	Medical consent must be clarified and in place for all children placed with foster carers.	31/03/06
4	FS8	Children Act	In line with Schedule 7 Section 63 (12) of the Children Act 1989 where an exemption notice is issued this notice must name all the children in placement.	31/03/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS1	Investigate options to provide a children's guide for younger children.
2	FS12	The supervising social worker should check that foster

		carers understand the documentation they receive when a child is placed and that they have all the necessary permissions and authorisations for any child placed.
3	FS13FS9	The fostering service should re-issue information to all young people and foster carers about bullying and telephone numbers available for support of any young person who might be a victim of bullying.
4	FS13	The fostering service should re-issue information to all foster carers about the CLA education helpline.
5	FS31	The fostering service should look at how communication can be maintained where a number of agency professionals are involved in the care of children with disabilities.
6	FS23	Foster carers should be encouraged to maintain a training portfolio.

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