



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

Fostering Services

Somerset County Council

Social Services Department

County Hall

Taunton

Somerset

TA1 4DY

29th March 2005

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

The role of CSCI is to:

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

Inspection Methods & Findings

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point 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 4-point scale ranges from:

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

'O' or blank 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.

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

YES

Name of Authority

Somerset County Council

Address

Social Services Department, County Hall, Taunton,
Somerset, TA1 4DY

Local Authority Manager

Christine Frost

Tel No:

01823 335285

Address

Social Services Department, County Hall, Taunton,
Somerset, TA1 4DY

Fax No:

01823 357900

Email Address

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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

5 January
2004

Date of Inspection Visit		29th March 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Jon Swift	164147
Name of Inspector	2	Deborah Turner	071397
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Christine Frost	

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(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service

3. Management of the fostering service

4. Securing and promoting welfare

5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Independent and local authority fostering services which fall within the jurisdiction of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) 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 CSCI in respect of Somerset County Council. 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 CSCI 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.

Somerset County Council fostering service is part of Somerset County Council Social Services Department 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
- ❖ Short Break - offers 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 237 children and young people were placed with the service at the time of the inspection, of which 130 were boys and 107 girls.

The service currently has 274 households approved and 472 individual approved foster carers. The Somerset County Council fostering service recruits, registers, and provides ongoing support to new and existing carers. Area teams of qualified social workers and unqualified support staff provide ongoing advice and supervision of approved foster carers.

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.)

This was an Announced Inspection undertaken over a period of 5 days, not all the National Minimum Standards were assessed on this occasion.

The Inspectors were able to give feed back to the Somerset County Council fostering services manager, at the conclusion of the Inspection. The feedback covered areas of good practice and areas for improvement, although the feedback was not as comprehensive as the report.

The inspectors met with the fostering service manager and a range of staff involved in selection, approval provision of support and supervision to foster carers. The inspectors also met with 4 approved foster care families.

The Inspectors used 'case tracking methodology' which involved the examination of records/documents, discussion with the foster carers and evidence in relation to young people to determine how the National Minimum Standards work in practice. 4 case files were case tracked during this inspection.

Young people's views were sought using a questionnaire and one response was received.

Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service (Standards 1-3)

1 out of 3 standards was assessed. This standard was met

Inspectors were able to confirm that Somerset County Council fostering service has agreed policies and procedures for the recruitment of staff and foster carers. The majority of which, were complied with.

Management of the fostering service (Standards 4-5)

None of the above standards were assessed.

Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14)

Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers

8 out of 9 standards were assessed: All 8 standards were met.

Inspectors were able to confirm through interviews with staff and foster carers that health and safety checks are being completed in order to ensure safe environments for young people in care.

The matching process for foster placements was considered to be thorough. However, some minor shortfalls were noted in the recording and filing of matching processes carried out.

Foster carers interviewed were able to demonstrate a good understanding of the Council's equal opportunity policy and how to implement this in practice.
It was confirmed by staff and carers that equipment is provided for any child promptly.

Foster carers confirmed that they had received training in Child protection during their initial assessment period. However, follow up training offered by Somerset County Council fostering service was not being regularly accessed.

Foster carers had received the carer's handbook and placement agreements in line with National Minimum Standards.

Maintaining contact with families is seen as an important factor in ensuring that the foster placement is successful, and carers and staff promote this.

It was also evident that appropriate levels of finance are made available to support transport needs for contact visits.

There are regular newsletters prepared by the Local Authority and the chair of the Foster Carer's Association detailing activities, events and items of interest relevant to fostering. In interviews with foster carers this initiative was considered to be a useful source of information.

At the time of this inspection efforts were underway to recruit members with a specialist interest/experience for the fostering panels.

Medication procedures were discussed and considered to be appropriate at the time of this inspection.

Education for young people in foster placements is given high priority and a range of resources are employed in order to maintain where possible consistent attendance at school.

(Standards 15-23)

3 out of 9 standards were assessed: 2 out of 3 standards were met.

Staff working in the fostering service are all appropriately qualified with most having considerable relevant experience in children's services. A number of social workers had completed post-qualifying training. The resource team leaders interviewed by inspectors demonstrated a sound knowledge of the complexity of the work they and their staff team undertake.

At the time of this inspection there was a full compliment of staff within the fostering teams in Somerset. Plans were reported to be in progress to further enhance the fostering service.

Foster carer vetting procedures were considered to be satisfactory with appropriate safeguards in place.

From the records inspected it was noted that some managers had not adhered to the recruitment policies and National Minimum Standards.

Files examined and interviews with carers confirmed that the County Council and their allocated social worker provide regular meetings and support sessions and information.

Records (Standards 24-25)

1 of 2 standards was assessed. This standard was met.

Appropriate records are being maintained and where relevant, copies of these are shared in full with the foster carers, these were kept secure in those homes visited by inspectors.

Life story work and the use of photograph albums by foster carers were noted. Training for staff and carers in this area is being further developed.

Fitness of premises to use as a fostering service (Standard 26)

This standard was not assessed.

Financial requirements (Standards 27-29)

These 2 standards were not assessed

Fostering panel (Standard 30)

This standard was assessed and met

Appropriate arrangements were in place to support the decision making of the two fostering panels for Somerset.

Short term breaks (Standard 31)

This standard was assessed and met.

Short term and respite breaks for carers and children are well organised and supported.

Family and friends as carers (Standard 32)

This standard was assessed and met

The Somerset County Council fostering service had appropriate arrangements for considering and approving fostering by friends and families.

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?

NA

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	
			Not applicable	

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection 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 Jon Swift Signature _____
Second Inspector Deborah Turner Signature _____
Regulation Manager _____ Signature _____
Date _____

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 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	
1	20 Schedule 1	FS15	Any gap on a candidate's employment record must be investigated and the outcome recorded and retained.	01/06/05
2	20 (1) 20 (3) (a) (d) (ii)	FS15	Any occasion where a disclosure is recorded on a CRB check, a member of the senior management team must ensure that a record is retained on the individual's staff file detailing any approval for employment and the grounds upon which this decision has been made.	01/06/05
3	21(4) (a)	FS15	Records of probationary interviews must be signed and dated by the manager completing the report.	01/06/05

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	FS15	Records taken during Interviews should not record negative or subjective comments about the candidate.

2	FS8	Efforts should be made to ensure that all work undertaken to facilitate matching of placements including any emergency placement is retained on the case files.
3	FS15	Any member of staff required as part of their role to carry out recruitment and staff selection interviews should adhere to safe practice and follow the Council's policies.
4	FS24	The access to records policy and procedure for young people should be clarified in regard to any written records maintained by the foster carer.
5	FS24	A system to monitor the safe disposal of any records held by the foster carers at the end of a placement should be introduced by the Somerset County Council fostering service.

* 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	NO
Foster carer survey	NO
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	NO
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	NO
• 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	NO
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	29/03/05
Time of Inspection	14.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	60

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the CSCI 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?

0

This National Minimum Standard was not assessed/inspected on this occasion.

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?	0
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This National Minimum Standard was not assessed/inspected on this occasion.

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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Inspectors carried out examination of staff recruitment files for 4 staff recruited since the last inspection report was completed.

Records examined indicated that Somerset County Council follows agreed policies and procedures when recruiting new staff. The Human Resources team, based within the Social Services office at County Hall, are responsible for obtaining and recording the required checks and references in relation to new staff had been received. From the records examined the inspectors were unable to confirm that telephone enquiries to follow up written references received had been undertaken. NMS 3.2

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?

0

This National Minimum Standard was not assessed/inspected on this occasion.

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

X

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

X

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

X

Serious illness or accident of a child.

X

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

X

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

X

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

X

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

X

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

X

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

X

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

X

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This National Minimum Standard was not assessed/inspected on this occasion.

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

This inspection confirmed that foster carers provided a safe and nurturing environment. As part of the assessment of new foster carers, staff are required to complete a written risk assessment of the carer's home, to ensure it is safe and meets young peoples needs. The assessment includes checks on carers' transport, to ensure it is safe and suitable for a child's needs. Foster carers and staff stated that a review of the health and safety risk assessment was undertaken prior to foster carer's annual review. Completed health and safety checks were found on the 4 files examined.

The Somerset County Council fostering service policy promotes single occupancy bedrooms for children who are fostered. Foster carers and staff interviewed confirmed that this policy is met wherever possible.

Discussions with staff and carers supported that a system of matching and assessment is completed and measures put in place to safeguard the children. However, the assessment was not clearly shown on individual files examined by inspectors.

Staff and foster carers stated that the pre-approval training for foster carers covers health and safety issues. It was reported that the foster carers handbook provides clear guidance on health and safety matters.

Although some foster carers were aware of the role of the Commission for Social Care Inspection in the main they had not been informed by the Somerset County Council fostering service staff about the purpose of these visits.

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

As evidenced throughout the body of this report, the take up of training by foster carers is an issue for future attention and development. However, in regard to promoting equality and enhancing individual children's abilities and skills, the inspectors were satisfied that those foster carers interviewed demonstrated an appropriate level of skill to achieve this.

Somerset County Council fostering service had an equal opportunities policy that all staff are required to promote.

Staff interviewed acknowledged that recruiting carers from a range of culturally diverse backgrounds within the county of Somerset presents a challenge.

Staff and foster carers confirmed that equipment is available to meet the needs of children

with disabilities, and that this is usually provided promptly.

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

Discussions with staff demonstrated that considerable work goes into ensuring that children are appropriately matched with foster carers, capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. The importance of matching is stressed in the policies and procedures. Children and carers' files examined did not always contain matching considerations.

The findings showed that there is a high demand for placements; limited resources and information from children's social workers can affect the matching process.

The Service Manager acknowledged that there is not always a sufficient range of carers to meet the current demand for placements.

Inspectors noted from files examined and later confirmed with staff that much of the matching process for emergency placements is verbal. This resulted in a lack of records evidencing the level of work taking place in order to underpin emergency placements.

The Service Manager and the staff interviewed acknowledged that the size and geography of the County can compound difficulties when matching emergency placements.

Staff and foster carers reported that where placements are planned, they are usually given the opportunity to get to know each other prior to making a decision about the placement

When a child is placed with a foster carer a member of the Looked After Children team makes contact with the carer. This contact is to assist, support and advise carers about educational issues. It was reported that this is further supported by the provision of a designated teacher for looked after children in every school in the county of Somerset.

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?	3
<p>The service works to Somerset County Council Child Protection Policy and Procedures. The foster carers handbook clearly sets out the foster carers role and responsibilities in regard to protecting children.</p> <p>Foster carers confirmed that they had received training on child protection during their initial pre-approval training. Staff interviewed had not received recent training input relating to child protection. It was reported that some carers were in the process of undertaking a distance-learning package, Educare, which contains a module specifically relating to issues of child protection awareness.</p> <p>Records showed that 2 training events had been organised within the county, of these only 1 had taken place with 8 carers in attendance.</p> <p>The foster carers told inspectors that they had received and understood information on safe caring. Staff and foster carers confirmed that the pre-approval programme covered safe care issues.</p> <p>Carers who met with the Inspectors were aware of the vulnerability of children in care in relation to bullying. A clear anti-bullying policy is included in staff training. It was reported that the carers' Handbook contained information on this.</p> <p>Inspectors were told that the foster carers agreement makes clear to foster carers that the use of corporal punishment is not acceptable and outlines acceptable methods of discipline and managing behaviour. All foster carers interviewed by inspectors confirmed that they had received a foster carers agreement for each placement.</p> <p>The Inspectors were informed that the foster carers Handbook contained a clear procedure relating to a child missing from home and those carers interviewed were able to articulate the actions to be taken.</p>		
Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	X	%

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
<p>Somerset County Council fostering service provides a detailed policy on promoting contact. The findings throughout the inspection showed that children are encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships, where there are no contact restrictions. Details concerning agreed and restricted contact were seen on the individual files examined by the inspectors. There were also details about the outcome of any contact visit.</p> <p>The inspectors noted on 1-file records detailing how agreements for contact had been reached and on what basis the contact was to occur. Financial support is provided to assist foster carers to support contact arrangements. Carers confirmed that the Somerset County Council fostering service paid transport and costs incurred to support contact.</p>		

The staff interviewed confirmed that in some cases foster carers are requested to keep records of the impact of contact on the child and of any other relevant and significant events. Carers who the Inspectors met showed a clear commitment to maintaining links with the child's family and friends.

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?

3

The children are able to request the members of staff and family they wish to have in attendance at their placement review. This agreement has been reached following comments and suggestions from children.

There are regular newsletters prepared by the Local Authority and the chair of the Foster Carer's Association detailing activities, events and items of interest relevant to fostering.

Staff interviewed reported that the opinions of very young children could at times be difficult to ascertain. Where this is the case every effort is made to get an objective viewpoint. It was reported that the use of advocates and promise mentors is encouraged.

The Local Authority has a complaints procedure for all children in care. It was reported that all complaints received from children are investigated. Staff told inspectors that carers are required to record complaints from children, and alert the child's social worker.

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**

Accounts from staff, carers and children and records examined maintained that children's health needs were being met, and promoted in line with the carer's Handbook.

The Somerset County Council fostering services manager reported that work was being undertaken to further develop links with health agencies, including recruiting a panel member with a clinical background. Staff spoken to considered that it was important to encourage and respect individual roles in the care of children and to develop clear communication systems.

Foster carers and staff confirmed that carers received basic training in health issues.

A nurse for 'Looked After Children' has responsibility for coordinating health assessments, and health promotion.

The Local Authority plans to appoint a qualified community psychiatric nurse to provide support in areas related to mental health.

Staff interviewed reported that consent for treatment wherever possible is given by the birth parent. This was confirmed by foster carers interviewed. Where this is not possible carers indicated that they were aware of the procedures governing consent to treatment.

The inspectors requested information concerning the administration of controlled medicines. Staff stated that some children self-administer medication, for example inhalers. However, where the foster carer administers any controlled medicines, these arrangements are detailed in the placement plan for the child.

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**

The Inspectors found that importance is given to meeting the educational needs of children or young people in foster care.

In the pre-inspection information provided by Somerset County Council a total of 38 computers with educational packages had been given to foster carers.

A further 40 computers are currently on order and some carers had been provided with 'top boxes' to enable internet access to young people without a computer.

Inspectors were informed that additional financial assistance for extra curricular school activities is decided on an individual basis.

The Somerset County Council fostering service also provides accredited training to the foster carers around educational issues. Carers who met with the inspectors were clear as to their role and responsibilities in supporting a child or young persons educational needs.

See also National Minimum Standard 8 re-educational support for children in foster care.

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?

0

This National Minimum Standard was not assessed/inspected on this occasion.

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?

2

The findings throughout this inspection showed that staff working for the fostering service were suitable to work with children and young people. Social workers had an appropriate qualification and most staff had considerable childcare knowledge and experience. Evidence was seen that some staff have completed Post Qualifying training, and that this was being encouraged and supported by the Local Authority.

The inspectors were informed that 2 staff are qualified practice teachers and that it was considered that student placements were beneficial to the student and the staff as this often led to debate and discussion about practice.

From the files inspected it was noted that some managers conducting interviews had not adhered to the Somerset County Council staff recruitment policy and National Minimum Standard 15.2. The following shortfalls were highlighted:

- One file did not contain a written explanation where there was a gap in the person's employment. From the interview record it was not possible to assess that this had been discussed/explored at interview
- Declaration of criminal convictions detailed within an application form was examined and then compared to the interview record, from this the inspectors could not confirm that this had been discussed or explored at interview
- Approval by a senior officer to facilitate the early appointment (pre CRB return) of a member of staff was not on file and could not be produced.
- The approval by a senior officer to permit ongoing employment following a disclosure on a CRB had not been formally recorded.
- The inspectors were concerned when examining files that interview records contained opinion rather than factual responses made by candidates. In addition to this, interviewers had recorded negative statements that were irrelevant to the interview process.
- HR staff were frequently requesting probationary interview records when they had not been returned from managers as per the policy and procedures of Somerset County Council. It was noted on a file examined that the probationary report was not dated or signed by the line manager of the employee.

The inspectors noted on the files inspected that the required recruitment checks and

information had been requested for staff.

Resource team leaders interviewed by inspectors demonstrated a sound knowledge of the challenges faced by workers in their teams and of the complexity of the work they undertake. Additionally Resource team leaders were positive about the role of non-qualified staff within their teams.

Information about staff turnover was not assessed for this inspection.

Total number of staff of the agency:	X	Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:	X
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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?

0

This National Minimum Standard was not assessed/inspected on this occasion.

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?

3

It was reported by the Somerset County Council fostering services Manager that at the time of this inspection there was a full compliment of staff within the fostering teams in Somerset. The inspectors were also advised on the proposed appointment of a Fostering Development Manager and their potential role within the service.

All staff are eligible and have access to the County Council training and development programme, that has included Child Protection updates and topics of specific interest and relevance to child care.

Staff interviewed during this inspection considered that they were well supported by managers and received regular and planned supervision. All staff considered that their current workloads were manageable.

The inspectors did not on this occasion fully assess the procedures for the recruitment of foster carers. However, this has been assessed in previous inspection reports and the NMS was met at that time. Information provided in the pre-inspection questionnaire states: from 01 February 2004 to 01 February 2005: 40 foster carers were de-registered by mutual consent. It was noted that no placement was terminated by Somerset County Council

fostering service following any child protection investigation.

Information from carers interviewed confirmed that they had been thoroughly vetted before they were accepted as foster carers.

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?

0

This National Minimum Standard was not assessed/inspected on this occasion.

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?

0

This National Minimum Standard was not assessed/inspected on this occasion.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**All staff are properly accountable and supported.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****0**

This National Minimum Standard was not assessed/inspected on this occasion.

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**

Foster carers interviewed confirmed that they are clear from information provided by the Somerset County Council fostering service about their role in regard to any children placed with them.

Inspectors were able to confirm from the 4 files examined as part of case tracking methodology that foster carers were receiving either face-to-face supervision or telephone contact on a monthly basis. The County Council foster care agreement met the requirements of Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Foster carers who met with the inspectors confirmed that they had received a copy of the handbook.

The Inspectors found that the Somerset County Council fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting foster carers, which was understood by staff and carers. This included arrangements for training, supervision, out of hour's support and reviews.

Carers who the Inspectors met were clear about the role of the supervising social worker, and stated that they were receiving a good level of support from their support worker.

Carers also confirmed that the County Council Fostering Service provides a regular newsletter, which contains a good level of information. Carers and children are encouraged to provide items for the newsletter.

Staff informed inspectors that foster carers offer each other support and advice. Foster carers also have regular coffee mornings and occasional social events. The Fostering Service Manager stated that funding could be made available for relevant events that involved training of carers and development of the service.

A general foster carer telephone support system was introduced. However, this was not widely used and had been discontinued at the time of this inspection.

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?**

0

This National Minimum Standard was not assessed/inspected on this occasion

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?**

0

This National Minimum Standard was not assessed/inspected on this occasion.

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
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Records in foster carers homes are kept to a minimum, and in those homes visited records were kept secure. It was reported by staff and foster carers that all records are disposed of when the placement ends. However, inspectors were not able to confirm consistent practice in this area.

The child's social worker maintains the case record for each child, and shares with foster carers information relevant to maintaining the child's wellbeing.

Foster carers and children's files examined were found to be well organised and all files contained up to date information.

Files examined confirmed that foster carers were informed about the reasons any child placed with them was in foster care, and the purpose of the placement. This was confirmed in interviews with foster carers.

Each foster carer is provided with a diary in which, they record significant events and information relevant to the child. The foster carers confirmed the use of this diary for recording any information.

Discussion with the staff and foster carers revealed a lack of clarity on how young people can access these records. Although all staff interviewed believed that access to records was subject to the County Council access to records/information policy.

Some foster carers have received training on assisting young people in developing a life storybook, and the County Council has recently purchased a training package from BAAF (British Agency for Adoption and Fostering) in order to develop this work further.

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?	0
This National Minimum Standard was not assessed/inspected on this occasion.			
Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			X
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			X
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			X
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			X
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			X
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	X	Maximum £	X

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?

0

This National Minimum Standard was not assessed/inspected on this occasion.

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?

0

This National Minimum Standard was not assessed/inspected on this occasion.

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?

0

This National Minimum Standard was not assessed/inspected on this occasion.

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?

0

This National Minimum Standard was not assessed/inspected on this occasion.

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
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The inspectors were provided with copies of the minutes from both fostering panels for the last year. It was noted from the information provided that; careful and detailed discussion had taken place in making decisions about placements and approval of foster carers.

The Fostering Service Manager does not attend panel meetings but undertakes the role of 'decision maker'

The Fostering Service Manager stated that efforts are ongoing to recruit an independent chair for each panel operated within the County. The Authority is attempting to recruit an independent parent of a looked after child.

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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The service provides respite care for children cared for by other foster carers, and short break care for children with a disability who live with their family.

Staff informed the inspectors that wherever possible consistency of carers is maintained for respite and short break care.

The Local Authority Fostering Service management recognise that carers need to have the opportunity to take regular breaks from the challenge of providing foster care, and have built into the 'home base carers' service an entitlement of annual leave.

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?	3
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The Inspectors found that clear policies and procedures were in place relating to family and friends as carers. The findings showed that the fostering service gives importance to supporting family and friends as foster carers. Staff largely assess and approve family and friends as carers applying the same assessment procedures as other carers, taking into account their relationships with the child.

Equality of funding, training and support is made available to friends and families who foster.

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 29th March 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

Comments were received from the provider

Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report

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

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 21st June 2005, 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

Action plan was received at the point of publication

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

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

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S0000041894.V210049.R01

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