



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Bath & North East Somerset Fostering Services

Social and Housing Services

PO Box 3343

Bath

Bath & N E Somerset

BA1 2ZH

7th June 2004

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

Bath & North East Somerset Fostering Services

Address

Social & Housing Services P O Box 3343 Bath BA1 2ZH

Local Authority Manager

Sarah Worth

Tel No:

01225 395332

Address

Lewis House, Manvers Street, Bath, BA1 1NY

Fax No:

01225 396951

Email Address

Sara_worth@bathnes.gov.uk

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

22/04/03

Date of Inspection Visit		7th June 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Sam Chisholm	102696
Name of Inspector	2	Jacqueline Sullivan	
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		Sara Worth	

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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 Bath & North East Somerset Fostering Services. 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

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.

Bath and North East Somerset Council was established as a Unitary Authority on 1st April 1996 as part of the Local Government Reorganisation. It was previously part of the former County of Avon, and includes the city of Bath, towns of Keynsham and Midsomer Norton, Radstock and the surrounding areas.

The Family Placement Team is part of the Children and Family Services, Social and Housing Services Department. The Fostering and Family Link Services are the subject of this inspection, using the National Minimum Standards and Regulations for Fostering Services.

The Family Placement Team undertake the following range of services:

- Emergency and respite placements
- Short breaks for disabled children and young people
- Short term placements preparing children for a return to their family or for adoption
- Long term ('permanency') placements, eventually preparing young people for independence and adulthood
- Remand and Bail placements for young people in trouble with the law
- Parent and child placements
- Placements for sibling groups
- Kinship care placements

Bath and North East Somerset has a range of Fostering Schemes to meet the needs of the young people. The range of placements are as follows:

- **Mainstream Carers:** who may care for children and young people on a Short Term or Long Term ('permanence') basis.
- **Fee Paid Carers:** who are carers for young people aged 10 years+. Carers must demonstrate evidence of meeting specific competencies to be approved for this scheme. Carers may be approved for a combination of Fee Paid and Mainstream placements.
- **Respite Carers:** who provide short breaks for children to support families or other foster carers.
- **Family Link Carers:** approved within the Family Link Scheme to provide regular sessional care for children with disabilities. This may include a combination of day care and overnight care.
- **Kinship Carers:** who are relatives or friends of a child or young person, approved to provide care specifically for that child.

The Family Placement Team is located in Lewis House in the centre of Bath, where they share accommodation with other Social Services and Housing teams, including the majority of the child care case-holding teams. This facilitates communication between the social workers for the child and carer.

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).

Brief Introduction

This was the second annual announced inspection undertaken under the Care Standards Act 2000. A full audit of the fostering service was undertaken in relation to the National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Two requirements were identified in this inspection. One was in relation to providing out of hours support to foster carers as detailed in standard 18 of this report. The second requirement was about revising refurbishment plans as detailed in standard 26 of this report.

As noted at the last inspection the Inspectors observed a high level of commitment and motivation from all foster carers. The Inspectors found the manager and staff to be approachable and supportive, in line with feedback from the pre-inspection questionnaires from carers and placing social workers. The family Link staff were highly praised in the carers questionnaires.

The foster carers seen as part of the inspection were positive in their feedback about the level of support they receive. They commented that the FPT staff members are approachable and respond promptly to requests for support.

The staff team were all experienced in childcare. Most staff members had experience of working in all areas of childcare social work. Three members of staff have been working on the family placement team for several years and were able to demonstrate an ongoing consistent response to the foster carers.

The main issue arising from carers during this inspection was in relation to payments.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

1 of 1 standard assessed were met

A copy of the Statement of Purpose was seen and contained all of the details required to comply with Standard 1 apart from the numbers and outcomes of complaints.

Fitness to Provide or manage a fostering service (Standards 2-3)

2 of 2 standards assessed were met

The Team Manager is suitably qualified and well experienced to manage the fostering service.

Management of the fostering service (Standards 4-5)

2 of 2 standards assessed were met

The organisational structure is included in the Statement of Purpose. The fostering service staff were interviewed as part of the inspection They were clear about the lines of accountability within the organisation.

Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14)

8 of 8 standards assessed were met

The carers' homes visited as part of the inspection were found to be of good standard in relation to furnishing, décor and hygiene. There was evidence of age appropriate toys and equipment available for their use.

The Manager explained that every effort is made to support carers who look after children from different cultural backgrounds, seeking advice from other carers from Black and other minority ethnic groups.

Staff members described the system for referrals for placements to be received and processed. Full information about the young person is sought to assist the matching process. During the inspection an Inspector attended a team meeting and observed the

discussions to match children to placements, and to observe the family placement duty system. Evidence of trying to match children to appropriate placements was demonstrated. The foster carers receive training in Communication with Children to enable them to listen to young people, and support the young people to express their views. Carers are encouraged to develop ways of encouraging the children and young people to express their needs and feelings, and training is provided in Makaton and PECS (picture exchange communication system).

The Inspector met with the senior community paediatrician, who is the medical advisor to the family placement team, and coordinates the medical plans of all children looked after. This discussion and scrutiny of the young peoples files confirmed that all the requirements of this standard were met. The Inspector noted that the service provided for the young people exceeded the required standard.

The Inspector met with the Education coordinator for looked after children. She has been seconded to the childcare Looked After Team. She explained that her role is to work across the child care teams to raise awareness of education issues, support the foster carers to support the education of the young people in their care and identify an education package for children and young people who are non-attending. The Inspector noted that the service provided for the young people exceeded the required standard.

Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers (Standards 15-23)

8 of 9 standards assessed were met

All the above standards in relation to recruitment practice and the support and training of foster carers were met apart from provision of specialist out of hours support.

Records (Standards 24-25)

2 of 2 standards assessed were met

A cross section of foster carer's files were inspected. They were found to be well presented with information clearly referenced at the front of the file for ease of access. There was consistency of presentation and content. Up to date information about current and previous placements was available.

Fitness of premises for use as fostering services (Standard 26)

1 of 1 standard assessed were met

At the time of the inspection the team manager had her own office, however the inspectors saw copies of refurbishment plans (currently at consultation stage) that would entail her losing her office. The premises provided for the team would not then be appropriate for the purpose and would not meet the standard. The plans need to be revised to include an office for the team manager.

Financial Requirements (Standards 27-29)

3 of 3 standards assessed were met

The fostering service is funded as part of the local authority Social Services department.

Fostering panels (Standard 30)

1 of 1 standard assessed were met

The Fostering Panel meets on a monthly basis and was observed during the inspection. The Terms of Reference for the Panel were also seen and were appropriate.

Short Term Breaks (Standard 31)

1 of 1 standard assessed were met

The Family Link Service was seen to meet the required standard. The only issue raised by carers was that of the payment system to carers.

Family and Friends as Carers (Standard 32)

1 of 1 standard assessed were met

Kinship carers are assessed and checked in the same way as other foster carers and records of these were seen on their files. They also now attend the same induction training and have access to the same annual training programme and support as other carers.

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:

NO

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?

NO

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	
1	17	FS21	Review the out of hours support for foster carers.	31/10/04

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	Sam Chisholm	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	Jacqui Sullivan	Signature	_____
Regulation Manager	Michael Miles	Signature	_____
Date	28th September 2004		_____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements 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	17	FS18	Provide out of hours support to foster carers as detailed in standard 18 of this report.	31/12/04

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	FS1	Include details of number and outcomes of complaints in the statement of purpose.
2	FS4	Set up a monitoring system for the matters identified in schedule 7 as detailed in standard 4 of this report. The Child Care Quality Manual to be updated to reflect current legislation.
3	FS29	Consult carers about payment problems as detailed in standard 29 and standard 30 of this report.

* 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	13
Survey of placing authorities	NA
Foster carer survey	YES
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	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	07/06/04
Time of Inspection	09:30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	50.0

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?
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The Statement of Purpose was drawn up In April 2002 and updated in April 2004 to include up to date information. A copy of this was seen and contained all of the details required to comply with Standard 1 apart from the numbers and outcomes of complaints. This information needs to be added. The document is clearly presented and the information is readily accessible.

A Children's Guide is available, and is provided to the older age group of young people when they start to be looked after. The Guide was drawn up following consultation with young people who use the advocacy service, and they gave feedback about the information they wished to have included, language and the size of the document. The Children's Guide contains details of the Commission and the Shout Out! advocacy service. It was recommended at the last inspection that consideration be given to producing information for younger children in a format that they can understand. This work is currently in progress in consultation with the advocacy scheme.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The Team Manager is suitably qualified and well experienced to manage the fostering service. She is a qualified social worker with a CQSW gained in 1982, and achieved the Certificate in Health and Social Service Management and NVQ4 in 1999. She has 15 years experience at a management level and demonstrated strong management skills during the inspection.

The Team Manager is complemented by an experienced senior practitioner, who has 15 years experience of working in the family placement team and has an in depth knowledge of the service provision. She has completed introduction to management training and is currently studying for the certificate in management studies. The Team Manager and senior practitioner coordinate the service provision of the family placement team, including recruitment and resource development, support for carers and young people, and therapeutic services.

The senior practitioner has lead responsibility for the development of the adoption services. She carries a small caseload, and has supervisory responsibility for four staff members. The Team Manager has supervisory responsibility for the rest of the team, including the administrative staff, and takes lead responsibility for the development of the fostering service.

The team now also has an NNEB trained member of staff with management experience who supports 2 foster carers (supported by the team manager) supervises the R2K respite scheme sessional workers and carries out the health and safety checks of carer's homes.

The staff team are experienced child care workers with qualifications in social work. They demonstrated that they work closely with partnership agencies to promote an integrated child care service to foster carers, children and young people.

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

The staff files checked as part of the inspection demonstrated that the necessary information is available as required in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

The Team Manager is involved in the recruitment and selection of new members of staff, and seen all references and other documentation; a copy of which is held on each individual staff file. Written references are now followed up by telephone and all staff have CRB checks and photographs on file.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The organisational structure is included in the Statement of Purpose. The fostering service staff were interviewed as part of the inspection. They were clear about the lines of accountability within the organisation. All staff receive regular supervision from their identified supervisor. The team manager and senior practitioner are clear about their roles and responsibilities within the team. They organise annual leave and other absences to ensure that one or the other is always available. The Team Manager is supervised by, and accountable to the Group Manager.

There was a discussion around the recording of the matters identified in Schedule 7. Although these matters are individually monitored by the team manager, it is recommended that a system is devised to enable these matters to be monitored as a whole, by both the team manager and senior management and a copy of any subsequent report sent to the CSCI.

There is an allocated budget for the service, which is set annually. The team manager explained that the finance department monitors budget expenditure, and she receives monthly statements of expenditure. There is an annual audit.

Details of the fostering allowances are included in the information pack for prospective carers. Current carers are notified annually of changes to the allowances. Details of the increase to current allowances were seen during the inspection.

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

1

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

1

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

0

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

The Manager informed the Inspectors that the job description for her post clearly states the duties and responsibilities. The post covers the management responsibility for the fostering and adoption services, including family link. The Team Manager is supported by a senior practitioner, and they share responsibility for the supervision of the staff team, while the team manager retains overall responsibility. The manager and senior practitioner plan their annual leave arrangements to ensure that they are not on leave at the same time. The staff team demonstrated that they were aware of the lines of communication within the department. All staff members described the team manager as open and approachable. They said she is supportive and encourages autonomy of practice while being able to be appropriately directive at times

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The suitability of the foster home is taken into consideration as part of the assessment process. The carers' files contained details of the facilities available in the home. The manager explained that financial assistance would be given if necessary to enable suitable carers to provide a suitable home environment. Examples were given of refurbishment that had been undertaken in the Family Link carers' homes, including adapted beds and new showers. All carers' are inspected annually, including a Health and Safety assessment, copies of which were available on the files. The assessment includes a summary of the action to be completed and timescales in which to complete the work. The carers' receive health and safety training appropriate to the needs of the children in their care, with additional training in relation to manual handling, administration of medication and nursing sick children for carers of children with disabilities provided by the community health teams as appropriate. The fostering handbook and policy manual contain copies of health and safety information that is provided for the carers'.

The carers' homes visited as part of the inspection were found to be of good standard in relation to furnishing, décor and hygiene. There was evidence of age appropriate toys and equipment available for their use. In some instances, foster children share bedrooms. The manager explained that this would be subject to a full assessment prior to the placement being agreed, and factors such as age, gender, behaviour, and personal history of all the young people in the household would be taken into consideration. They would also discuss potential placements with the social worker for the other child to determine whether room sharing was appropriate. The foster carers receive child protection training as part of their assessment training. At the last inspection the Inspector noted that the foster carers are not requested to write a 'Safe Caring' policy specific to the household, looking at all aspects of providing a safe environment for the children and young people in their care. A recommendation was made that carers should draw up a 'Safe Caring' policy, which is reviewed annually as part of the review process. At this inspection the manager stated that the foster carers are given guidance about how to write the policy and that it has been built into the annual review system. The manager said that most but not all foster carers have completed the policy.

The carers' vehicles are checked as part of the assessment and annual review, including checks of the appropriate documents.

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

The pre-inspection documentation indicates that the fostering service has contributed to the work of READ (Racial Equality Action and Development) Children's sub group, and have been invited to contribute to the work of the newly formed Disability Equality Action Group chaired by the Head of Children and Family Service.

The Family Placement Team have experienced difficulties in recruiting foster carers to meet the needs of all children requiring placements, in particular relation to ethnicity. They have continued to address this shortfall. Bath and North East Somerset has linked with two other local Unitary Authorities in a recruitment campaign. They have started an initiative campaign with housing associations that house black and ethnic minority families to encourage their tenants to foster children.

The Manager explained that every effort is made to support carers who look after children from different cultural backgrounds, seeking advice from other carers from Black and other minority ethnic groups.

At the last inspection the Inspector noted that carers commented that the necessary hair and skin care products needed are not readily available in Bath, and it necessitates a trip to Bristol to purchase the items, which are more costly than other toiletry products. At this inspection the manager stated that they use the newsletter as a forum for information about hair products.

At the last inspection some carers said that it would be valuable to have a support group set up for carers of children who are Black or from other minority ethnic groups. A recommendation was made in relation to this issue. The manager stated that since the last inspection they have discussed this issue with the carers who stated they would prefer to have informal support groups and that they did not want to have a separate group.

The Intranet has guidance for staff entitled 'Meeting the needs of Black and minority ethnic children and their families'. This includes an assessment tool to identify the placement needs of the children and young people. A copy is provided for carers who provide care for Black and other minority ethnic children and young people.

Children with disabilities receive specific services and are able to access respite care via the family link scheme. The family placement team recruit and supervise carers under the family link scheme, who provide support and care for children with ill health and/or a disability. The two members of staff with responsibility for supervising the scheme explained the training programme provided for carers to enable them to fully meet the needs of the children and young people, and enable them to be valued and develop a sense of self-esteem. Discussions with two carers and information from the questionnaires confirmed that training is seen as a priority and is mostly well attended. Carers said they had established positive working relationships with the community health teams who provided training and support to meet the specific needs of the individual children, and provided necessary equipment.

The Inspectors met with the clinical psychologist from the LOCATE project who works with carers either individually or as a group to provide guidance and training about seeing the young people as a whole person. They focus on enabling the young people to develop confidence and self esteem. Additional funding has been made available to expand this

service. The Inspectors were shown the programme and content of courses and noted that this a unique and valuable service for foster carers.

All carers and looked after children are provided with a card that enables free access to leisure facilities provided by the Council. Carers commented that this was appreciated, and enabled the family as a whole to use the facilities.

The Inspectors met with a support worker from R2K (the Respite 2000 scheme) that provides activities for young people that carers may be unable to provide due to family commitments. The Inspectors saw a detailed programme of events that included camping trips, climbing and trips to the Zoo and Blaise castle in Bristol. There is also an initiative to involve Bath University students to provide activities throughout the year for all looked after children.

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
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Staff members described the system for referrals for placements to be received and processed. Full information about the young person is sought to assist the matching process. However, in emergency or crisis situations, information about the young person may be limited. At the last inspection some staff members commented that a lack of information may lead to a young person being inappropriately placed, and could potentially lead to a disruption of the placement. At this inspection the staff stated that this situation has improved.

During the inspection an Inspector attended a team meeting and observed the discussions to match children to placements, and to observe the family placement duty system. Evidence of trying to match children to appropriate placements was demonstrated.

Feedback from carers confirmed that they are mostly given full information available about the child or young person in advance of the placement. However, two foster carers who responded to the questionnaire stated they had either been given basic facts or inadequate information about young people. They stated that they got the full information eventually.

Carers from the family link service were all happy with the amount of information. About the young people they received. The matching process was both sensitive and detailed. It was evident from meeting family link carers who have looked after the same children for several years that the matching process was sound.

In the family placement team, when an appropriate match is identified, details of the carers are forwarded to the placing social worker for discussion/agreement. The social workers for any other child in the placement are also contacted and advised of the potential placement and their views sought as to the suitability of the child being placed with the other children there.

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**

All foster carers receive Child Protection training, as part of the Choosing to Foster course, and further training as part of their ongoing development. At the last inspection the Inspector recommended that foster carers develop a 'Safe Caring' policy relating to their household, agree family rules for promoting safety and that this should be reviewed as part of the annual review process. As previously stated this process has started (see standard six).

The 4 foster carers including two family link carers, spoken to demonstrated awareness of the vulnerability of the young people in their care, and were able to describe the action they would take if they had concerns about their safety or well being. A policy for responding when looked after children are missing provides clear procedures to follow. At the last inspection the Inspector noted that there was no evidence of an Anti-Bullying policy being available in the child care manual or foster carers handbook, and it was recommended that a policy be developed. The manager stated that this is currently being undertaken by the service manager but has not as yet been completed.

The team manager maintains a file of allegations and incidents, including complaints about foster carers to enable ongoing monitoring. The manager and the panel monitor the contents of this file.

The foster carers sign an agreement that they will not administer physical punishment to the young people. At the last inspection the Inspectors noted that some of the longstanding carers files did not have a copy of the agreement, and the team manager said that this was being addressed and all carers were due to be issued with an updated agreement as a part of their next supervisory visit. The inspectors noted that this is now taking place.

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**

The fostering handbook contains information relating to contact, and the role of the foster carer in promoting contact. At the last inspection several of the foster carers confirmed that contact arrangements take place in their home, and they would appreciate training with regard to supervising contact. Some foster carers expressed concerns about the impact of contact taking place in their home on their own family, particularly when the plan is for the child to return home and a high level of contact is arranged. At this inspection the Inspectors noted that training in relation to contact in this area has been planned and none of the foster carers who responded to the questionnaires had concerns about the practicalities of contact arrangements. Carers maintain weekly record sheets about the young people, and are asked to comment on contact arrangements. These were seen to be satisfactory.

Foster carers particularly demonstrated sensitivity with regard to the information the young people chose to share with their peers about being looked after, Some carers commented that contact arrangement which breakdown are difficult for the young people and they were able to demonstrate they deal with this situation sensitively.

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

All children looked after receive consultation forms prior to statutory reviews. The consultation forms have been revised to provide a user-friendly document that encourages feedback. In the Family Link Service the views of the young people are ascertained by observations of the interaction between the carer and the young person.

An advocacy service, "Shout Out" has been commissioned with 'Off The Record' who provide an individualised advice service for young people, and advocates will accompany children to meetings to ensure their views are sought and recorded. The service will also support young people who make a complaint about the service they receive whilst in the care of the local authority. They provide a drop in service for care leavers and assist young people who are homeless. The manager stated that there are sometimes issues around the amount of money care leavers receive. She said that there is now a commitment from the local authority to give a planned service rather than a reactive service in relation to allocation of money to care leavers. From their discussions with the young people they have noted that pathway plans are not always in place for all the young people. This appears to be dependant upon the social worker involved. She noted that there has recently been an improvement in this area.

The foster carers receive training in Communication with Children to enable them to listen to young people, and support the young people to express their views. Carers are encouraged to develop ways of encouraging the children and young people to express their needs and feelings, and training is provided in Makaton and PECS (picture exchange communication system). Interpreters are provided when English is not the first language. The Inspectors saw the PECS boards at family link carer's homes.

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?**

4

The Inspector met with the senior community paediatrician, who is the medical advisor to the family placement team, and coordinates the medical plans of all children looked after. This discussions and scrutiny of the young peoples files confirmed that all the requirements of this standard were met.

All children are offered a medical examination by the medical advisor. Many of the older young people choose not to attend, and there are plans underway to extend the service to provide a drop-in service for the young people to receive help and advice in relation to all health issues. A venue is still to be identified for this service. Young people who choose not to attend their medical appointments are provided with a gender specific information pack, with advice and information about local health services. A children's nurse is available to meet with the young people in the Family Planning Clinic. Currently all routine medical examinations take place during school hours on a set day each month. Carers are

encouraged to maintain registration with the child's own GP to enable consistency and continuity of health care.

A medical advisor attends the Panel meetings, and reviews whether the carers have been proactive about meeting the health needs of the young people in their care.

Carers looking after children with specific health needs were positive about the support they receive from the community health care teams, in relation to advice, training and the provision of equipment.

Children that are taking the drug Ritalin for the condition A.D.H.D. (an attention deficit disorder) are monitored monthly for the first three months then three monthly thereafter.

The LOCATE project provides support from a consultant psychologist and a psychotherapist from the CAMHS team. The project was set up under the Modernising Services funding in 2000, looking at the psychological, emotional and behaviour needs of looked after children. They provide advice and training group sessions for carers, and will undertake individual assessments to support carers and prevent breakdown of placements.

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?	4
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The Inspector met with the Education coordinator for looked after children. She has been seconded to the childcare Looked After Team. She explained that her role is to work across the child care teams to raise awareness of education issues, support the foster carers to support the education of the young people in their care and identify an education package for children and young people who are non-attending. This includes linking with the LEA to identify appropriate schools in the area with a vacancy, and sending any Statements of Special Educational Needs to the appropriate people.

The LAC coordinator stated that the role of the foster carers is "crucial" so she works alongside them to deliver the best service for the young people.

She links with social workers to ensure that Personal Education Plans (PEP's) are set up and reviewed at the appropriate frequency. She represents the rights of the child or young person at meetings.

Figures provided indicate that Bath and North East Somerset Council perform better than most local authorities in relation to school attendance for looked after children. As last year, current statistics indicate that 100% of children are attending school within 20 days of commencing placement unless they are excluded. The LAC coordinator said that numbers of looked after children who are excluded are lower than the national average and she was able to provide statistics to substantiate this. The PEP's look at previous exclusions, and the education officer looks at joint planning with education and social services to support the young people to be reintegrated in to schools.

The education coordinator also has an advisory role regarding further education and funding. Young people are encouraged to continue education post-16, and a grant is available to cover the cost of books, essential equipment and trips. The Local Public Service Agreement

provides funds to meet identified targets. The Education coordinator stated that Bath and North East Somerset Council are targeting educational attainment for care leavers.

Computers are provided for all young people aged 15 and over to support their GCSE studies, and computer training is provided for carers if necessary to enable them to provide assistance. The education coordinator explained that there is an expectation that the young people will have suitable provision to enable them to complete their homework. A support service is in place to enable young people to receive additional one-to-one tuition at home after school hours to enable them to develop their numeracy and literacy skills, and gain confidence at school. The Inspector saw written feedback from foster carers in evaluation questionnaires that confirmed that they felt this service was beneficial to the young people in their care.

Work experience programmes are arranged for looked after children aged 15 years and over, within Bath and North East Somerset Council. The young people can earn £60 per week during the school summer holiday, and gain confidence, skills and experience in the workplace.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

All of the carers who were seen at the last inspection that provide placements for teenagers, expressed concerns about the process for supporting the young people to develop the necessary skills for moving on from their foster placements to living independently. They stated that the young people are not routinely transferred to the Adolescent and Leaving Care Service just prior to their pathway plan. The carers commented that the young people were therefore expected to discuss plans, hopes and fears with a social worker they did not know and had not had time to establish a working relationship with.

At this inspection two foster carers, in the questionnaires, echoed these views and the Inspector noted that one young person receiving care from the Family Link Service did not have a Social Worker in this important time in their lives until the foster carers brought this to the attention of the Family Link Social worker. This was then quickly resolved.

The child care manual indicates that the Assessment and Action record forms the basis for the pathway planning process, and that this must be completed by the first review after the fifteenth birthday. Independence training is provided by the leaving care service in partnership with the children's advocacy service and the young people are taught to develop practical skills and develop knowledge about living independently. The Inspectors read a sample of young peoples files who are receiving a service from the Adolescent and Leaving Care team and noted that all the files seen contained a pathway plan. One plan had not been formally updated to reflect the current situation for one young person. Discussions with social workers confirmed that independence training takes place. Foster carers stated that they don't routinely receive copies of the young persons pathway plans and that having these plans would assist them coordinate a package of care with young persons social worker.

At the last inspection the Inspector noted that there was a lack of clarity amongst foster carers about the leaving care service that is provided. They said that they were not given any details about the savings scheme, with regard to the proportion of the allowance that is

saved or how interest is calculated. It is recommended that clear information is provided to all carers. The manager stated that information is now available in the foster carers handbook and there are plans to review the scheme.

The Child Care Quality Manual does include information about the implementation of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. At the last inspection the Inspectors noted that it would be updated following a review of the implementation of the Act. This remains outstanding.

All of the foster carers seen during the inspection, especially Family Link carers demonstrated a high level of commitment to the young people in their care, and a willingness to continue to provide a home and ongoing support when the young person ceases to be looked after.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The local authority has written recruitment and selection procedures. The manager and senior practitioner responsible for recruitment and selection of staff have attended appropriate training for this and operate within the procedures.

All staff are interviewed as part of the selection process and interview notes were seen on their files. Two written references are taken up and telephone enquiries are now made to follow these up. Satisfactory records were seen of CRB checks, references and staff ID including photographs. The manager also advised the Inspectors that the same process is undertaken for all sessional workers in the R2K project.

All social work staff had appropriate professional qualifications and copies of these were seen on their files. All social work staff involved in the approval and assessment of foster carers were qualified and experienced in this area. At the time of the inspection the family placement team also had a student on placement who was supervised by the team manager. A non-social work qualified member of staff was also supporting two foster carers and was also supervised by the team manager.

The foster carer files showed that all carers had undergone assessment and reference checking and approval by the fostering panel.

Total number of staff of the agency:

17

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

3

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?

3

There is a clear management structure both within the family placement team and within the local authority. All staff within the team are accountable to the team manager, who is in turn accountable to the group manager. The team manager and senior practitioner provide supervision for the social work staff and the administrative staff meet individually and as a group with the team manager.

The team meet fortnightly to discuss and assign cases but the team manager ultimately

determines, prioritises and monitors workloads and assigns tasks to staff. A team meeting was attended by one of the inspectors and was seen to be well conducted with opportunities for all staff to have input.

The team manager and local authority fostering panel ensure that assessments, approvals and reviews of carers are managed and implemented effectively. The local authority checks the inspection reports of agencies that they use. Agency placements have a contract that specifies the quality of care to be provided and this is monitored by the children's social workers and the reviewing officers.

All social work staff receive annual appraisals and monthly supervision by either the team manager or the senior practitioner. Records of this were seen on staff files and staff confirmed in interviews that they received appropriate supervision.

Staff and carers both have the opportunity to undertake appropriate training and skills development. Evidence of this was seen in staff records and in the annual reviews of carers. The team has four administrative staff, each assigned to particular social workers. Enquiries from prospective carers are dealt with by the recruitment social worker and new requests for a service are dealt with by the duty social worker. The team now use a computerised system for recording called Care First. This is being introduced in three stages which means that the team currently have both paper and computer files for different aspects of recording. Staff had experienced some initial problems with the system and this will be followed up at the next inspection to ascertain whether the problems have been resolved.

All staff interviewed felt that they had sufficient access to the range of advice they needed to provide their service. The team have access to an education advisor, a consultant paediatrician who is medical advisor to the team, psychologists and the local authority legal services department. Children have access to the 'Shout Out' advocacy scheme for independent support.

All staff interviewed said that they had been given contracts and job descriptions and copies of these were seen on the staff files. The job descriptions are too generic to properly describe their roles and need to be more specific. They are given a person specification that relates to their role to accompany the job description.

From interviews with staff it was evident that they had a clear understanding of their own role and that of the children's social workers. Foster carers also understood the separate roles, which indicated that the teams have clearly defined roles.

The staff receive an employee handbook which was seen to contain an equal opportunities, grievance and disciplinary policy and health and safety procedures. All other policies and procedures are available for staff on the intranet.

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**

At the time of the inspection the team was fully staffed. From interviews with the manager and staff, staff records and comments from the carers, it was evident that the team have sufficient numbers of staff with appropriate experience and qualifications to meet the needs of the fostering service.

The policies for training opportunities, regular supervision and workload monitoring were appropriate to encourage the retention of staff. The training and support offered to carers was sufficient to encourage retention.

The fostering service has a recruitment policy and strategy aimed at recruiting a range of carers. One social worker within the team has responsibility for the recruitment of foster carers and had just been recruited to the post. She was still in the induction period and therefore not able to comment fully on recruitment strategies. This will therefore be followed up at the next inspection. It is noted that the team have previously tried a variety of strategies, including teaming up with other local authorities in order to attract the range of carers required to meet the needs of the service. Strategies have included a joint campaign with North Somerset and South Gloucester Local Authorities to recruit carers from ethnic minorities, local and national press advertisements, bus advertisements and promotional events.

There is a clear assessment process for carers which includes initial information being sent to them, followed by a home visit, prior to a social worker being allocated to carry out an assessment with them. Successful completion of this results in a recommendation to the fostering panel for their approval. The team use the form F method of assessing potential foster carers. This comprehensively covers assessment of all the qualities, competences and attitudes necessary to be a foster carer. Most foster carers that I spoke to had understood and accepted the assessment and approval process and timescales and had felt supported by the team through this. Copies of the carers' assessments were seen on their files.

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?****2**

The evidence from staff, manager and carer interviews and staff and carer records indicated that the local authority and family placement team have sound employment practices for both staff and carers. They also have suitable management systems for carer supervision, appraisal and support.

There is currently no specific out of hours support service available to carers and this service needs to be provided. Currently carers only have access to the emergency duty team (EDT), which because of its generic role and the wide geographic area it covers, does not offer them sufficient specialist support outside of office hours. The team manager explained that provision of a more specialist out of hours support service was currently being negotiated in partnership with North Somerset and South Gloucestershire local authorities.

The staff employment pack contains a health and safety policy and foster carers receive a handbook that was seen to contain relevant health and safety procedures and guidelines. Health and Safety checks of carers' homes are now being carried out by the NNEB trained member of staff.

Both staff and carers receive a copy of the whistleblowing policy.

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?	3
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All staff have access to the local authority training programme for on-going development. They are also able to negotiate individually to attend specialist courses offered by other providers and are encouraged to take the post-qualifying award. Staff have regular supervision which identifies their training and development needs. Records of this were seen on staff files. Staff were generally happy with the training available to them, although some commented that it could be difficult to find the time to attend due to their workloads.

Staff are expected to attend at least five days of training per year. At the time of the inspection one member of staff had just completed PQ1 part of the Post Qualifying Award, two more were due to start this in January 2005, one new member of staff already the full PQ award and another was a practice teacher.

All staff are given an induction programme that enables them to learn the tasks associated with their role and to meet the other professionals that they will need to liaise with in the performance of their role. Copies of these were seen and discussed with new staff.

Staff discuss new legislation at team meetings and are provided with appropriate training. The team has also had four half days focussing on practice issues pertinent to their work. Some joint carer and social worker training is provided.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Staff job descriptions, supervision and appraisals are detailed in standard 16 of this report.

Social work staff attend fortnightly meetings with the team manager. All staff interviewed said that they felt able to contribute to the agenda and discussions in these meetings and that their views were listened to.

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**

There are clear strategies for working with carers which include arrangements for training and development, support of foster carer groups, supervision, information and advice, assistance in dealing with education and health services, respite care and reviews. Evidence of these was gained from staff and carer interviews and records.

It was evident from interviews with carers that the role of their social worker was clear to them. Annual reports are available as part of the annual review of foster carers by the fostering panel. Copies of these were seen on the carers' files.

Staff from the family placement team told us that they have good systems of communication with the children's social workers. This was also evident in the records of conversations between the social workers that were recorded on the carers and children's files.

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?

3

The general foster carer agreement and specific supervision/support agreement were seen and set out the responsibilities of both the carer and the local authority. Between them they contained all of the information required by schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Each carer has a named social worker who meets with them a minimum of every six weeks for supervision and support. Family link carers have an individually agreed frequency of visits related to their needs at the time, but not less than 4 times per year. The foster carer agreement outlines what will be discussed in the supervision sessions. The sessions are recorded on the 'Care First' system. A sample of these records were seen. Social workers also make at least one un-announced visit a year and a record of this was also seen on the carers' files.

New diary sheets have been introduced to give carers a framework for their diary notes. These are then discussed with the social workers.

Most of the carers visited felt that they received good support from their social workers in the form of visits and phone calls. The family link carers felt that they received good support and skills training from relevant healthcare professionals when needed, and other carers valued the support they receive from attending training with the 'Locate' psychologist service.

All carers receive a copy of the latest foster carers handbook, which covers policies, procedures, guidance, legal information and insurance details. A copy of this was seen (updated in April 2004) and all carers visited said that they had received a copy.

The manager told me that all carers are insured by the local authority's insurance policy. Most carers said that they had been paid promptly and where problems had occurred their social worker had followed this up.

The family placement team supports a local foster carer association financially. The group was visited during the inspection and was found to be well attended, informative and supportive.

The manager told me that respite care is provided for carers on an individually agreed basis in addition to the provision of the 'Respite 2000' service that provides day trips and holidays for foster children and the carers' own children.

All carers are given information about how to complain both informally within the family placement team and through the local authority complaints system. Records of complaints and allegations are kept in a complaints and allegations log and monitored by the team manager. Individual records are also kept on carers' files. Both types of record were seen during the inspection and were satisfactory. These are monitored by the complaints officer and the team manager.

Information about procedures for dealing with allegations is given to staff and carers. Independent support is available for carers in these situations.

The circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster carer register were

seen included within the fostering panel terms of reference.

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?

3

The induction training for carers includes a talk from an experienced carer. Kinship carers now also attend this training.

A training officer jointly organises with South Gloucestershire local authority an annual training programme for carers. The programme for the current year was seen and includes training relevant to the promotion of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice. Attendance is encouraged by offering a variety of venues and times.

The training officer had found that training courses were generally attended by the same few carers and that there was not good attendance overall. She reported that there had been little change in this since the last inspection and thought that many carers get their training needs met through the 'Locate' service. Most of the carers seen during the inspection had attended this service and it was highly praised by them. There was also good attendance at the two 'Safe Care' policy training events and most carers have now completed their policies. It is recommended that strategies are used by the whole service to improve carers' attendance at training events.

The training officer meets individually with carers following their approval to discuss their training needs. Carers' individual training records and needs are also recorded in their annual reviews and this information is then sent to the training officer. She uses the information to create the following year's training programme. Carers are asked to complete evaluation forms at the end of training sessions. The training co-ordinator uses these to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the training. She felt that communication with the fostering service regarding training had improved during the past year and that the quality of training information included on the carers' annual reviews was more useful now.

The co-ordinator uses a paper free method of supporting carers to complete NVQ courses and has found this to be successful. Evidence can be recorded on a digital camera and inputted into a programme on the co-ordinator's laptop. This programme also records what percentage of the course has been completed. An external verifier looks at the information held on the laptop to award the NVQ. The inspector was impressed that since the last inspection a kinship carer and family link carer had both completed their NVQs, four are currently doing it and a few more are waiting to start.

There is still no specific consideration given to the help and support needed by the children of carers and it is recommended that this is provided.

Male carers have access to a fathers and male carers group in Bristol called 'Our Place', but it is recommended that some specific training is offered to them.

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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A cross section of foster carer's files were inspected. They were found to be well presented with information clearly referenced at the front of the file for ease of access. There was consistency of presentation and content. Up to date information about current and previous placements was available. Some recordings are now also made on the 'Care First' system and these were also seen to be satisfactory.

As part of the tracking process, some children's files were inspected. These were clearly laid out and included all of the necessary Looked After Children paperwork and Pathway Plans where appropriate. This had greatly improved since the last inspection and the team manager reported that the group manager now sees and monitors the quality of the referral information and core assessments given to the fostering service.

Carers maintain weekly records about the young people, and now have a pro-forma to use for this to help them maintain an accurate and meaningful record. From visits to foster carers, there was evidence that they understood the importance of maintaining confidentiality at all times, and stored information securely.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Separate records are kept within the family placement team for staff and carers. The manager reported that the files are still monitored regularly but she is not yet able to record this on the new computerised system.

The children's files are held within the relevant child care teams, and a sample were inspected as discussed in the previous section. The system for keeping records for children is congruent with the LAC system.

Complaints and allegations against Foster Carers are recorded on their individual files, and referred to in their annual review. A copy of all complaints and allegations is held in a central file, to enable the team manager to monitor for patterns or trends.

Recently employed staff files showed compliance with the requirement of the regulations.

There are procedures in place for access to files, secure storage and management of confidential information. The storage for information includes lockable cabinets, password protected computers and security systems protecting the building. The department has a clear desk policy, and all files are securely stored when not in use.

It was noted that the system for recording and storing information was compliant with the requirements in Regulations 22 & 30, and maintained an accurate register of foster carers in accordance with Regulation 31. The first phase of the 'Care First' system has been introduced and it is anticipated that when fully operational, this system will assist with recording, storage and production of information relating to the work of the fostering service.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			85
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:			13
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			22
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	103.46	Maximum £	341.83

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Family Placement Team office accommodation is located in Lewis House, in the centre of Bath. This is a large office building, which provides accommodation for Social Services and other Council departments.

The family placement team share an office with the 'looked after children' team. This enables easy access to staff members for discussion. Good use has been made of the filing cabinets to divide the teams, and reduce noise. The children and family child care teams, and the adolescent team are based on the fourth floor of the building.

The Council has plans for the future use of its accommodation that includes consideration being given to the accommodation currently used by the Family Placement Team. The plans include the provision of small meeting rooms for managers to undertake supervision and confidential discussions. The Team Manager currently has a designated office and there was concern expressed by the Inspectors that removing this facility may have a detrimental effect on the service to staff.

There is appropriate storage for records and computers are password protected, the building is protected by a security system.

The Council holds adequate insurance for the premises and its contents.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering service is funded as part of the local authority Social Services department. There is an annual allocated budget, and the Service Plan determines how the budget will be spent. The manager ensures a monthly breakdown of expenditure is available to monitor spending. The Finance Department provide advice in relation to budgeting matters. A copy of the budget plan was available at the inspection.

The local authority Payroll Services ensure regular payment of staff salaries, including deduction of Income Tax and National Insurance.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Chief Executive, Chief Elected Member and the Director of Social Services determine how the overall budget will be allocated. The budget is held centrally, and delegated to the team manager for management of the individual budgets. The expenditure in the team includes advertising, equipment for foster carers, and training. This is monitored and controlled by the team manager. The team manager is now also able to email the finance department to end placement allowances so that carers are not overpaid.

The Staffing expenditure requires the approval of the group manager.

The Councils accounts are Audited and published annually.

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?

3

There is a written policy on fostering allowances and details of the items that fees are expected to cover are provided in the Foster Carers Handbook. Fees are reviewed annually.

Carers are paid on a fortnightly basis and extra payments for holidays, Christmas and birthdays are paid automatically throughout the year. Some carers are paid a weekly fee to recognise the additional training they have undertaken.

The allowances had been increased to just below that recommended by the Fostering Network. The team manager said that it is anticipated that the allowance will match the recommended Fostering Network rates by next year. Fees had also been increased since the last inspection.

Several carers reported problems with payments. Some felt that they did not get enough help with travel costs for the children, some were not happy with the financial arrangements for children preparing to leave their care, some were not happy with the new hourly payments for family link carers, and one would like to receive a set payment for special hair and skin care products rather than having to send in receipts. Because of the range of problems with finance reported by the carers, it is recommended that the service consults all carers about payment problems to see where improvements can be made.

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

The Fostering Panel meets on a monthly basis and was observed during the inspection. The Terms of Reference for the Panel were also seen and were appropriate.

It was noted by the inspector that much effort had been made to ensure that the membership of the panel was in accordance with the regulations. There was a good mix of members including health and education experts, and independent members including a local councillor and a former service user.

The Panel was chaired appropriately ensuring that all members had the opportunity to contribute. The Panel dealt with a mixture of approvals, reviews and update reports and members were seen to ask appropriate questions and thoroughly discuss any issues that arose. The information provided to the Panel was comprehensive and members were provided with a useful pro-forma to help them structure their consideration of issues and possible questions. The Head of Children's Services also monitors the information that goes to panel and raises queries where appropriate for panel members to consider.

The panel meeting includes time for panel business. During this part of the meeting the inspector saw a copy of the minutes from the previous panel and observed appropriate discussion of issues arising from them. This also forms part of the panel's overall quality assurance function.

After the meeting the panel chair was interviewed. Discussion revealed that she had substantial experience in adoption and fostering management and independent chairing of panels.

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?

3

The fostering service provides short-term breaks for disabled children that ordinarily live with their own parents. This service is known as the family link scheme. The scheme has two social workers specifically allocated to it and is managed by the family placement team manager.

The scheme has its own separate foster carers who undergo assessment, reference and CRB checks. They also complete induction training and have access to the general foster carer annual training programme. In addition to this, some specialist training and support group meetings are organised for the carers and they have their own separate handbook, which was seen to contain the policies and procedures specific to the family link service.

Carers receive supervision visits from their social workers at an individually agreed frequency according to the caring they are doing at the time. Records of visits and phone contact were seen on the carers' files. All of the family link carers spoken to by the Inspector stated that they received an excellent level of support from their social workers. They also reported that they were able to obtain any equipment and adaptations they needed. Some of the family link social workers stated that they would welcome a separate budget for the service.

It was evident from talking to the social workers and carers that the children's parents remain central to promoting their health and educational needs. One of the carers visited by the Inspector demonstrated the commitment that the carers feel to the children. She had spent many hours assisting the Child's parent gain information that would assist them in an educational appeal.

The children's placements in this scheme are only reviewed by the reviewing officers if the placement duration is likely to exceed 120 nights. Otherwise they are reviewed by the children's team managers. Copies of these reviews and the appropriate looked after children forms were seen on the children's files. The Inspector noted that one young person had not had a review for 18 months. The foster carers contacted Social Services to find that this young person did not have a current social worker.

The uptake of training by the carers in the service was high. As previously stated the issues that were highlighted by the carers was that of the payment scheme. Carers who responded to the questionnaire stated that the scheme was cumbersome and had, in some cases, resulted in loss of income. Others stated that they had not lost money but found the forms demeaning and created an element of mistrust. Most felt that they found it difficult to talk about money, as that was not the reason they care for the children and found an open forum

meeting inhibited them from expressing their views. The Inspectors recommend that a questionnaire is sent to the carers to move this issue forward.

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Family and friends of children who become their main carers are recognised by the fostering service as kinship carers. The local authority actively encourages consideration of family and friends as carers.	
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Kinship carers are assessed and checked in the same way as other foster carers and records of these were seen on their files. They also now attend the same induction training and have access to the same annual training programme as other carers.

Regular support from an allocated family placement team social worker was introduced for kinship carers in 2002 and they now receive the same levels of support as other carers. It was noted during the inspection that two carers had experienced significant gaps in support visits due to staff shortages in the last year. During this time they had received telephone support and visits when needed. This problem was also seen to have been highlighted in a letter from the panel chair to the head of Children's services. This has been rectified now that the team is fully staffed and will be monitored further at the next inspection.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Not 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 draft report relating to the Inspection conducted on 7th June 2004 of inspection Bath & North East Somerset Fostering Service and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

Comments received from Maurice Lindsay, Head of Children & Families Services 7th September 2004. Held on file at the CSCI Bristol North (LO).

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

Amendments to the report were necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate	<input type="checkbox"/>

Note:

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

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

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

Action plan was required	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan was received at the point of publication	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider has declined to provide an action plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: <enter details here>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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 Bath & North East Somerset Fostering Service 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 Maurice Lindsay
Signature Head of Children & Families Service
Designation _____
Date 7th September 2004

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of Bath & North East Somerset Fostering Service 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.

Commission for Social Care Inspection
33 Greycoat Street
London
SW1P 2QF

Telephone: 020 7979 2000
Fax: 020 7979 2111

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120
www.csci.org.uk

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