



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Somerset County Council

**County Hall
Taunton
Somerset
TA1 4DY**

Lead Inspector
Deborah Turner

Announced Inspection
22nd January 2007 09:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

| | |
|---|---|
| Name of service | Somerset County Council |
| Address | County Hall Taunton Somerset TA1 4DY |
| Telephone number | 01823 335285 |
| Fax number | 01823 357900 |
| Email address | |
| Provider Web address | |
| Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) | Somerset County Council Children & Young People's Directorate |
| Name of registered manager (if applicable) | |
| Type of registration | Local Auth Fostering Service |

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 13th February 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

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

SUMMARY

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

This was an announced key inspection undertaken by Deborah Turner, and Pam Fletcher Regulation Inspectors, over a period of 6 days.

The judgements contained in this report have been made from evidence gathered during the inspection, which included a visit to the service and takes in to account the views and experiences of people using the service.

The inspector used "case tracking methodology" which involved the examination of records and documents, discussion with the fostering services' staff, carers and children looked after to determine how the service was meeting the National Minimum Standards.

Eight foster carers of whom four were short break foster carers and nine young people were case tracked.

The service had deregistered forty foster carer/households and registered thirty six of which two were short break foster carers, since the last inspection of the service in February 2006.

Foster carers are paid at levels favourably comparable to independent fostering agencies and above those contained within the Department for Education and Skills guidance 'National Minimum Fostering Allowance and Fostering Payment Systems' July 2006.

The inspector was informed that young people would be able to see a copy of this inspection report via the children's web page or by asking their social worker for a copy.

Child friendly Summary:

This summary is written for the young people who are looked after in foster care by Somerset County Council.

The fostering managers were told in September 2006 that there would be an inspection between the 22nd and 31st of January 2007. Two inspectors were involved in the inspection of the fostering service.

The inspectors visited four foster homes, and spoke to the foster carers about how they look after the children living with them

The inspectors also spoke to some of the children living with these foster carers.

The inspectors also met two foster carers and spoke on the phone to two more carers who looked after children and young people with disabilities on a short break arrangement.

The inspectors also met with many other people including:

- Social workers for children and young people.
- The senior manager of the Fostering Service.

- The nurse who works with children in foster care.
- The independent reviewing officers (a person who isn't your social worker, who makes sure that the plan for your care is checked regularly).
- The people who are members of the 'foster panel'. The foster panel is where a group of people meet to help decide whether people are suitable to be foster carers
- The manager of the training for foster carers and staff to see that training opportunities are there for your foster carers.
- The manager of the recruitment team. The team who do the advertising to get new foster carers and start the checking of people who say that they want to be foster carers.
- The children's participation officer, a person that works with young people in foster care to make sure that the senior managers in charge of the services for children in care know what young people's ideas, hopes and wishes are.
- Social workers who look after the foster carers and supervise them.
- One inspector met with a small group of young people who confirmed that they were offered help and support and that the adults involved in their care did listen to them.

The inspectors also looked through lots of paperwork, including information on foster carers and records of when people had made complaints against foster carers. One inspector also attended the 'foster panel' that was held on 4th January 2007.

To help the inspectors to write the report the manager sent the inspector information about the fostering service. He also wrote to the inspectors and told them what he thought the service did well and what they could improve.

The inspector sent questionnaires to young people and to foster carers. Thirty were returned from young people and fourteen from foster carers. Unfortunately the inspectors forgot to send any questionnaires to your placing social workers. Instead an inspector sent an email to ask their managers if any of your social workers thought that the fostering service needed to improve anything. No replies came back, so it has been assumed that they are happy about the care you are getting from your foster carers.

Some of the things inspectors were told are listed below.

- That the social workers for foster carers are good at making sure carers are well supported and are checked properly to monitor that they are safe to care for children and young people in foster care.
- The service tries very hard to make sure that it listens to children and does what is best for children. The children's participation officer has a special role in doing this and is trying always to find new ways to involve young people in the decisions and influencing changes within the foster care services.

- All the young people said in their questionnaires that they are “always” or “usually” listened to by their carers. Several young people stated that their social worker listened to them and that if they had a problem they would talk to their social worker.
- All of the young people said that they “always” or “ usually” felt well cared for in their foster placement, which is great to hear. Some of the things that were said about their foster carers are in the main part of the report and some below:

*They are nice and take us to shows and buy us nice things.
Two young people said they felt safe and happy.
One said I am very happy with my foster sisters and brother
and my foster mum.
One said I could have my own bedroom and have how I like
it.*

- Foster carers and the nurse make sure children and young people stay healthy. They also check that children are happy or that there is someone they can talk to if they feel sad, angry or lonely.
- There are a group of teachers who work just with children in foster placements and these teachers and foster carers help children do well at school. The fostering service really wants children to be happy at school and to get good exam results.
- The foster carers the inspectors met were very friendly and cared about the young people very much. Their homes were comfortable and children had nice bedrooms, nice clothes and toys
- When children needed a foster placement the workers tried very hard to find them carers that the children/young people would get along with well.
- For the children and young people with disabilities the fostering service provided a short break service so that mums and dads could have a little break; sometimes just overnight or for a weekend.
- The inspectors spoke to some of the mums and dads who use the short break service, they were all really happy with the foster carers and said they were very nice people that cared well for their children when they stayed with them.

What the service does well:

The service was good at:

- You said in your questionnaires that it is good at involving you in decisions
- Making sure that suitable people are allowed to be foster carers, by doing lots of checks on them.
- The fostering social workers were good at making sure that they visited the foster carers often and kept notes of their visits.
- The foster care social workers were also good and making sure that they kept in touch with your social workers and shared important information.
- The training and development section were trying really hard to find training for your foster carers that could be done at home, or at different events across the county.
- Foster carers are now paid more money. This helps foster carers to pay for children to attend sports clubs, go on holiday and also helps to get more people to want to foster children.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The fostering service had made some improvements since the inspectors last visited.

- They had made changes to how they check on staff and all these extra checks make extra sure that young people are safe.
- The annual reviews for your foster carers were being kept more up to date.
- The manager had made sure that some legal forms to be used only if a foster carer has more children than they are approved for; have all the information written on them.
- More training for foster carers to do at home had been bought by the fostering service.

What they could do better:

The service needed to improve:

- The service for children with disabilities needed to have a bit more information that told people about what the service could offer. This should be in a statement of purpose like the one for mainstream services.

The young people who met inspectors could not remember having a pack with information about foster care.

- The information for young people needed to be updated and a system put in place to make sure that you all receive this, even if you are quite young.

Whilst the fostering service worked really hard to provide training for your foster carers

- It needed to make sure that more foster carers did certain training and were not allowed to go for long periods without doing some basic training. For example, safe care and child protection and if required special training to help them care for individual children/young people who have special or challenging needs.
- The agreements that foster carers signed needed to be written in a different way, all be the same for each area of the fostering service and meet with the fostering regulations.
- The fostering social workers and your social workers should be making sure that your foster carers have all the right legal papers and that they can get medical treatment for you in an emergency.
- The manager agreed that the teams would do some research about looking after dogs and pets to make sure that foster carers animals were safe to be with children and young people.
- The service for children and young people with disabilities should be looked at to make sure that it is doing the same paperwork as the other fostering teams.

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

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

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Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The fostering service ensures that children placed with their foster carers continue to receive any medical treatment or specialist care they might require. Developments continue in this area.

The provision of medical consent details to foster carers providing short break care must be fully completed.

EVIDENCE:

One inspector met with the authority's designated Looked After Children health care professional (Nurse) that had responsibility for coordinating the initial health assessment by a medical practitioner of all children brought into the care of Somerset County Council. This included the annual health assessment review for children in foster care. Foster carers who met with the inspectors were familiar with the annual health review process. Some young people had elected to see the nurse and others had their health reviews carried out via their own G.P practice. For those young people case tracked the medical review process was being managed well.

As previously reported children under the age of five had health assessments completed 6 monthly.

As stated in the pre-inspection material submitted, a dedicated social worker was to be appointed for children looked after who experience poor mental health. The timescale for appointment to this post was stated as 2 months. As stated in the pre-inspection material submitted, the completion of health care plans is low. In order to improve this the completion of plans was to be monitored by reviewing officers as part of the looked after children review process.

All foster carers were asked if they had received essential medical information about the child/young person in their care. They were asked if they had received and signed a written foster placement agreement detailing authorisation and information concerning consent to emergency medical treatment, first aid and non-urgent medical treatment for the child/young person/s in their care. Mainstream foster carers were more familiar with this documentation. For short break foster carers a contract of care not a placement agreement is signed and agreed by the parents and foster carers. Some foster carers were unsure what this document was and were unable to find any copy of this. It was noted within the files used for case tracking short break foster carers that where contracts, and consents were in place that these had been provided within the week of the inspection and no previous consents and contracts were seen in those files. Confirmation from foster carers was sought and confirmed that they had only been provided with these documents in January 2007.

The manager of the fostering service was notified of this at the time of the inspection.

No foster carers case tracked had a record of attending first aid training although one did state that they had done this, it did not appear on the training information supplied to the inspectors.

Following the Healthy Care Partnership initiative access to NHS dentistry was reported to be continuing to be widely available to young people in the care of Somerset County Council.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The current management arrangements for the fostering service are acceptable.

The fostering service makes available foster carers who provide safe and nurturing environments. Appropriate matching processes had been undertaken although this process was not always explicit within case files. Safety welfare and protection of children was being promoted through training but in many cases via the supervising social worker supporting foster carers not by foster carers attending training events.

Staff recruitment and vetting processes were satisfactory.

The foster panel membership had a range of policies and procedures for guidance. The functions and remit of the panel members was understood.

EVIDENCE:

The policy and performance manager children looked after, temporarily holds the management position for this service. It is hoped that the post will be filled within 2007.

Within the files examined as part of case tracking health and safety checks had been completed. The majority had been repeated annually. Some had full details of checks made to ensure gas appliances had been checked for servicing. Others did not contain this information and foster carers confirmed that this had not been checked. All had details of the checks conducted on fire safety, car MOT, tax and insurance. In total six foster carers were visited of which; two were short break foster carers. A further two short break foster carers were interviewed by telephone. All had had a health and safety check completed.

Staff undertaking these checks expressed a desire to have a more direct link to the health and safety department. The manager for fostering stated that he would endeavour to provide each area office with a named health and safety officer to contact for advice and information. The assessment of dogs in foster carers homes was discussed with several staff at different levels of the fostering service during the process of this inspection. It was agreed in a discussion with the fostering service manager that a more robust assessment process would be introduced following appropriate evidence based research. Some immediate matters noted by inspectors concerning health and safety were discussed with the fostering service manager at the time of the inspection, he agreed to take action to pass this on to the appropriate member of staff to investigate.

The inspectors noted that the majority of foster carers had an individual household safe care plan. This was less consistent in the short break foster carers files. The wider implications of safe care and household safety required more exploration, and might be a useful training subject for foster carers and staff.

The safe care plans should ideally be revisited whenever a child is placed with foster carers to ensure that it meets any change within the household. Also where intimate care is provided a written protocol should be agreed with the foster carers and parent.

Foster carers should receive training in child protection/safe guarding procedures. From the information provided few had attended this in the last 12 months. From the records of the short break foster carers case tracked only one had a record of attending child protection training and that was recorded as being undertaken in 2000. **See further section 'Management'**

Some young people allowed inspectors to see their bedrooms when they visited the foster carers. The bedrooms provided were individualised with posters and photos, they also had equipment such as a T.V, X Box and games. Short break foster carers had where required, been provided with specialist equipment suitable to meet the needs of the individual child/young person. Within the files examined for the short break foster carers the majority had evidence of the matching process being undertaken in a planned manner. Where this was less evident was within those files where the young people had been going to the foster carers for many years.

Comments from mainstream foster carers varied about how well the introduction of young people had been planned. Others felt that the true picture of a child/young person only became evident later and this had caused some concerns for a minority of foster carers.

No consistent recording system to evidence matching could be established from those files case tracked for mainstream foster carers. The success of matching was better evidenced when consideration was given to the length of placements and placement stability. (Detailed in the statement of purpose August 2006) and the comments received from young people.

Some foster carers visited were able to confirm that matching and pre-visits had taken place for the young people in their care. One young person visited had had a very considered introduction to the foster home and family.

The children who replied to the questionnaires said some very positive things about their foster carers. Out of the thirty who replied to the question '*Do you feel well cared for where you are living now?*'

Twenty four stated always and six stated usually. No child/young person stated that they never felt well cared for. Some quotes of what young people said are contained in the summary of the report. Other comments included: "*I feel well cared for*" '*because it is quality*' "*it is very good here*" "*they look after me*" "*because they are nice foster carers*"

Only fourteen surveys were returned from foster carers and within these: five considered the information received before the child was placed was good, three thought it excellent, four adequate and two poor. In qualifying the two poor responses foster carers had received the young people as emergency placements and reported that they later receive more information.

During the pre-inspection meeting the introduction of the duty IT mailbox system was discussed. The system is aimed to alert all family resource teams via the duty officer if a suitable match for a referral cannot be located within a desired area. The referral is typed and legible and is quickly passed to all areas for a match. It was too early to assess the success of this initiative.

In addition staff via the home finder IT files can access information about the training and skills of individual foster carers.

The inspector examined the recruitment files for three recently appointed members of staff.

All three files contained the required recruitment and vetting information, with one file also having the record of interview. The take up of two references for any internal candidates had been introduced following the requirement issued within the inspection report dated 13.02.06.

The inspector was informed that the recruitment procedures had been amended to meet the guidance issued to schools. (Safe recruitment guidelines)

It was reported that all recruitment to the Children and Young Peoples Directorate where a member of staff would have access to young people followed this guidance.

All three files contained signed terms and conditions, evidence of qualifications and membership of the General Social Care Council for social workers, an enhanced CRB, and a confidentiality declaration. One member of staff had started work prior to receipt of an enhanced CRB. A senior manager had authorised this. However, the correspondence did not make clear that this was for induction purposes only.

The inspector attended and observed the business of the foster panel meeting held on 04.01.07.

Panel papers were received beforehand and two new full assessments were put before panel on that occasion. The quality of the assessments was satisfactory however it would have been helpful to receive the full portfolio in order to get a better understanding of the potential foster carers. In particular the interviews with birth children, which, on this occasion were not included in the pre-panel papers. In one review put before panel a foster carer had not attended any training since 2005, this was not questioned.

Debate and collaborative working with all members input being considered and valued was observed. All decisions were formally recorded, and attendees at panel were informed that the panel recommend but do not ultimately make the final decision to approve.

One foster carer visited had attended panel and had found the experience quite daunting, having not been pre-warned that it would be a panel of at least five to eight people. One other foster carer had not been invited to attend and had wished to do so.

Unlike many independent agencies this service had not developed a pack about panel and its members to be sent to new foster carers attending panel, in order to prepare them for the experience of meeting so many people in a formal setting.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

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

7, 13 and 31

Quality in this outcome area is **good**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The fostering service works to provide placements that recognise the children's individual skills, talents and abilities, values and promotes equality.

Team 8 was again described as a positive service for young people and foster carers.

The educational outcomes for looked after children in Somerset remain a priority.

The short break services for disabled children were found to be working well in providing for and supporting parents and young people with disabilities.

EVIDENCE:

From the report dated 13.02.06:

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

For this inspection and as stated in the pre-inspection material submitted within the section for the quality outcome valuing diversity it stated: what we could do better:

- To identify a range of opportunities to support the growing ethnic groups in Somerset in anticipation of some of these children becoming looked after.

In identifying what the service does well in this the following comments were made:

- Social workers discuss specific need with foster carers regarding diversity and difference, with a pro-forma being used to indicate measures taken to rectify deficits
- Pre and post approval training for foster carers includes aspects of diversity, as does the training given to social workers completing form F assessments.
- Children with disabilities receive support in order to meet their identified needs

From the report dated 13.02.06:

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

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

Family placement social workers interviewed during this inspection spoke highly of their colleagues in Team 8.

For this inspection: From the fourteen questionnaires received from foster carers three identified shortfalls around education. The schools would appear to be the area where the foster carers felt the child/young person was not being given opportunities to achieve. Since the last inspection of this service the recruitment of six higher level teaching assistants had been completed, the

educational hotline is available every Friday 12-14.00. A number for direct contact outside this time to speak to a member of the team had been supplied to all foster carers via the training programme issued quarterly.

In contrast of the thirty young people who returned questionnaires the following response was made the question: Do you think that you receive the right help so you can be successful in your education?

Fourteen said always, thirteen said usually and three said sometimes, none stated that they never received help. Comments made included: *'Your care people will help you to get ideas about what you want'* *'people at school help me'* *'because it is important they help'* *'I get lots of one to ones'* *'lots of people tell me helpful things'*

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

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

10 and 11

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The fostering service works hard to ensure that children placed maintain contact with their birth family and others. Consultation with children looked after was considered to be an area of strength with signs of ongoing improvement and development. With even some younger children stating that they had their views and wishes heard.

EVIDENCE:

Short break shared foster carers are caring for children for short stays and so there is a high level of contact between carers and parents.

Consultation with children was being taken seriously, children are asked to complete questionnaires in preparation for their carers' reviews and for their own reviews.

The files examined of a number of children, identified planning and monitoring of contact. Foster carers also reported support in getting young people to contact visits. Foster carers were recording contact details in a diary and monitoring any changes in the young people pre or post a contact visit. There were clear plans in place for how the contact arrangements were to be met. Carers spoken with showed their commitment to the contact arrangements and insight into the benefits and potential conflicts of contact for the children/young people in their care.

The children who replied to the questionnaires were very positive about being listened to. Out of the thirty who replied, twenty stated that the carers "always" listen to them and six stated that they are "usually" listened to four stated that sometimes they were listened to. None responded that they are never listened to.

Thirteen stated that their social worker always listened, eight stated they usually listened and nine stated that they sometimes listened. None stated that they were never listened to by their social worker.

A significant number of questionnaires identified the social worker as the person they would go to with a concern or personal problem.

To the question 'Do you know how to make a complaint' twenty three stated yes, four said no and three said they didn't know.

Within the pre-inspection material submitted by the fostering service manager in the area what we could do better: for consultation examples given were:

- Ensure the views of young people inform all policy and practice development where it is likely to affect their experience of being in care
- Be robust in managing contact for younger children that may be dictated by court proceedings
- Increase availability of ongoing training for carers regarding contact and attachment

In reporting what had improved in the last 12 months the following examples were given:

- Increased participation with children and young people around sexual health matters
- Implemented advocacy for children and young people over ten involved in the looked after system
- Provided more mentors
- Increased filled posts within the Independent Reviewing officers' service. All reviews now chaired by an Independent Reviewing officer

The inspector met with the children's participation officer and discussed at length the work being done to include young people in consultation processes. Many of the initiatives included in the pre-inspection material were confirmed. A fuller explanation of some was given. For example young people had been asked to provide questions that they thought staff applying to work with looked after children should be asked at interview. Young people in the leaving care group had been trained by the children's participation officer to take part in interviews.

Using funding from the Healthy Care Partnership and with the help of a theatre company some young people in the care of Somerset County Council had made a video. The completed video relates to their experiences of the care system, this had been shared with potential foster carers during training. It included what they disliked most as well as what they liked highlighted their

experiences of being bullied and how important it was to some to remain in touch with their family.

It was hoped that more videos could be done in the future.

Part of the role of children's participation officer was to ensure that the consultation with young people was meaningful and influenced change. It was the role of the children's participation officer to take forward ideas from young people to senior managers who hold budgets that had a direct link to the children and young people's directorate.

The role included ensuring that the wishes and views of young people were listened to at any decision-making meeting, and where for any reason a change or request from a young person could not be implemented to explain to that young person why this was not possible.

Some young people have PROMISE mentors. An inspector visited a young person who had a promise mentor. The young person spoke positively about him and this was supported by the views of his foster carers.

The service also offers PROMISE advocates who unlike the mentors will work on a specific events led piece of work with a young person. A promise advocate was reported to offered to children aged ten plus or any child making a complaint. On conclusion of the work the promise advocate will no longer work with the young person. However, this involvement could lead to other referrals such as a request for a mentor.

Two children's awards ceremonies (celebration of achievement) had taken place, these were for young people aged thirteen and upward. However, the next event will include younger children.

Young people receive an award via a nomination from a teacher, foster carer or social worker. The categories include:

- Bravery and courage
- School
- Sports
- Kindness to others

Certificates and vouchers are awarded to the winners.

The event is held in a hired venue and includes a buffet and in the past had the '*Slambassadors*' making a guest appearance. The '*Slambassadors*' are affiliated to rap poetry and are beat box group. The event saw young people in workshops creating a performance and then doing a show of their performance.

There is a children and young people in care website, that was launched in October 2006. The inspectors, visited the website and they found it easy to navigate, colourful and informative.

As stated in the pre-inspection material submitted work in progress is to include the introduction of family group conferencing.

The children's participation officer stated that the coming into care packs provided to young people were under review. **See management.**

The inspector and the children's participation officer met with a small group of young people and discussed how they felt they were involved in their care and did adults listen to them. Comments were:

- *I was supported by my social worker to meet my new foster carers*
- *I can talk to my social worker and she listens*
- *Things have changed after reviews like when I asked to see my mum more*
- *Our foster carers give us lots of fruit and we had lots of presents for Christmas*
- *They helped me join the Brownies*
- *Sometimes transport goes a bit wrong*

Generally even the younger children present felt that the adults involved in their care did listen to their hopes and wishes, and had made efforts to change things for them.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

29

Quality in this outcome area is **good**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Foster carers received an allowance that was paid according to the agreed approval status and role of the foster carers. This was being received on time and was accurate.

EVIDENCE:

There are a range of fees and allowances paid to foster carers, dependent upon their designated approval. Foster carers are paid at a level higher than the National Minimum Fostering Allowances as recommended by the Department for Education and Skills 2006

Foster carers stated that they received payment on time and that payments were always accurate. One foster carer did comment that enhanced payments were often late. This was notified to the fostering service manager at the time of the inspection.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

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

1, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 and 32

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The service had a statement of purpose. This was examined. The children's/young person's guide and coming into care pack would benefit from review, as previously recommended

Staff organisation and management systems were considered to be working well and staffing levels within the fostering service were satisfactory. The short break management arrangements would benefit from review.

Staff understood the organisational structures within which they worked.

Measures were in place to support, supervise and assist foster carers personal development. Indications were that foster carers felt very well supported and valued.

Case records for the children and foster carers required a robust system of audit to be applied consistently across the service.

EVIDENCE:

The service had a statement of purpose and this had been updated in August 2006. The services provided by the short break service were not fully detailed within the statement. A statement specific to that service should be developed or added.

The inspector met with the children's participation worker and discussed the children's guide and coming into care pack. Very few young people who met the inspectors recalled receiving a pack. The children's participation worker reported that information provided to young people including the children's guide was under review.

There are clear lines of management within the organisation and defined boundaries. However, the fostering support workers specifically working with short break foster carers currently sit within the children with disabilities teams, and were receiving management supervision from the team leader of that team. This meant that they may not always be receiving supervision from a person with experience of short break or foster carers form F assessment processes. In a meeting with these social workers it was evident that this did pose a challenge. One member of staff had clearly not had a satisfactory induction. The administrative support systems for this team appeared limited and required that the social workers undertake a high number of administrative tasks. The social workers admitted that this did sometimes lead to oversights, for example renewing medical reports and CRB's on time also remembering to send out well in advance for information to inform reviews. It was evident that the majority of administrative shortfalls were noted on the files of the short break foster carers. The impression was that this team were somewhat adrift from their fostering support colleagues and yet they each valued being in teams with the social workers for children/young people with disabilities. Examples were given where they had been left off mailing lists, found out through colleagues elsewhere about changes to procedures such as changes to the form F assessments tool. It was reported that the area manager had made efforts to rectify some of the shortfalls identified by the team. This was welcomed by the social workers interviewed.

Positive changes included them doing the initial visits to any potential foster carer for the short break service and being involved in the pre-foster carer training and the social workers for the short break foster carers had developed peer support links with their colleagues at the Somerset Inclusion Partnership Barnardos.

The inspector met with the staff development officer and discussed in detail the training and development opportunities available to staff and foster carers. The take up of on line distance learning was still going well and since the last inspection nine foster carers had completed the Educare course. One had completed the Ackamas course, and six were undertaking it. A total of fifty-eight foster carers were doing some form of distance learning. The staff development officer had since the last inspection, purchased a number of the Warwickshire Core Skills distance learning packs. Therefore there were three levels of on line training available to foster carers. Joint working had also commenced with the newly appointed manager within the central recruitment team to ensure that the link with training commenced at the very early stages of the recruitment of foster carers. Despite the continuing efforts of the staff development officer and the flexibility of courses now available a number of foster carers fail to take up training opportunities. This is concerning as they are not receiving updated training in essential areas. A range of subjects such as managing behaviours, first aid, supporting a child leaving care, NSPCC creative communication and child protection are only a few of the courses available. The fostering services manager informed inspectors that life story work training is to be re-launched.

As well as courses and training opportunities the training programme sent to each foster carer quarterly includes help line numbers, such as the contact details for the Children Looked After Education Team, On The Level Drug Service and dental advice line. Some foster carers had been provided with learning materials from their supervising social worker and had done some home leaning. A method of capturing this information was not in place. The recommendation that foster carers maintain a training portfolio has been repeated in the report.

A team leader had been appointed to the central recruitment team since the last inspection of this service. The inspector met with the manager and administrator (Secretary) for this team. The team consisted of the team leader overseeing one full time and two part time social workers, two part time support workers; the team also had a full time secretary providing administrative support. The team leader shared the vision for the future of this team. It is hoped that in the future the assessments of foster carers would be done by this team with some sessional worker support where required. The inspector was provided with a flow chart detailing the process for assessment from the point of enquiry onward.

Other planning included a protocol for the assessments of kinship carers and systems to monitor the numbers of kinship carers in place or undergoing

assessment, and improved coordination of the skills to foster course to ensure consistency across the county.

The team leader had significant experience of fostering services. The inspector discussed with the team leader how information and statistics about the recruitment of foster carers is obtained and interrogated. Failures in previous systems for this had been identified and a support worker was now making contact with any applicants that dropped out to obtain any significant information about why this might happen. In addition the feedback required from the initial point of contact had been found to be failing to ask where an applicant had first seen or heard about becoming a foster carer. Action was being taken to rectify these problems and to produce solutions for the future to avoid losing vital data. The inspectors looked at the council website to assess how easy it was to obtain information about becoming a foster carer for Somerset County Council. As discussed with the team leader this is an area that could potentially become a better resource for recruitment, but some improvements should be considered. For example, simplified means of initial contact and an assurance of the timescale for contact to be initiated. The inspector was informed that no specific recruitment strategy existed for the recruitment of short break foster carers, an area of the fostering service focussed on during this inspection.

The inspectors met with the family placement social workers (children's workers) they reported that communication with the fostering teams was good. It was reported that this continues to improve and was definitely better than in the past. It was recognised that the placement choices for some young people were difficult to meet due to a lack of foster carers available to foster teenagers, for example. Family placement social workers reported that they had on occasion used independent fostering services. The family placement social workers felt that more communication now existed between them and foster carers, sighting examples such as at the end of a placement the foster carers being given an opportunity to state their views about how things had gone with a placement.

Foster carers reported that they received regular support/supervision visits from their supervising social worker; each confirmed that they received a copy of the minutes taken during their meetings. Unannounced visits of a minimum of once annually were taking place. Good communication records of contact with foster carers were noted on files. A foster carer stated that the out of hours service was superb and said '*what would we do without them*'

It was discussed and agreed with the social workers for the short break foster carers that supervision should be balanced and proportionate to the number of children/young people linked, and the number of overnight sessions a person was providing.

The main shortfall was that the foster care agreements found on the files did not meet the requirements of the National Minimum Standards or Fostering

Regulations 2002. In the files of short break foster carers the format used was out of date and had not included the terms of the foster carers approval. Most of the agreements found on files also failed to include the name of the foster carers or the terms of their approval.

The majority of the agreements found on the short break foster carers files had been issued within January 2007 and none before December 2006; no previous agreements were seen on files. Foster carers confirmed they had not had an agreement previously. The mainstream foster carers files had a more recent format in use that met the requirements of Schedule 5 regulation 25 (5) (b) of the Fostering Regulations 2002. However, again the terms of the foster carer's approval had not been completed.

Foster carers training has been dealt within the body of this report and is considered as an area that should be improved.

The children's files examined as part of case tracking were generally in good order containing all of the documentation relevant to the child/young person. The authorisation for medical care was not always available on the files see section **Being Healthy**.

Some staff that met with inspectors were unhappy about the accommodation available to them and felt that the introduction of a hot desk policy had made it difficult to work consistently. Foster carers did comment that sometimes you could not get hold of staff. The staff stated that they thought that some of this could be attributed to not having a desk with a dedicated telephone extension/voicemail. The inspectors discussed this informally with the manager of the fostering service and the service are committed to looking at this issue. The short break service was looked at more closely during this years inspection of the fostering service and several matters requiring the attention management have been identified. Some parents of the young people using this service were interviewed by telephone and each was overwhelmingly positive about the quality and strengths of this service. Several had been using the service for a number of years and felt that it had enhanced their own and their child's life. Those new to the service were equally positive about the benefits to their family by using the service. Good relationships were reported between carers and parents. One parent stated *'I cannot believe the efforts that they made to make my child so welcome'*

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

| BEING HEALTHY | |
|----------------------|--------------|
| <i>Standard No</i> | <i>Score</i> |
| 12 | 3 |

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

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

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

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

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

No

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

| No. | Standard | Regulation | Requirement | Timescale for action |
|-----|--------------|-----------------------|--|----------------------|
| 1 | FS1 | 3 | A statement of purpose specific to the short break service to be produced or this to be explicit within the current statement of purpose. | 31/05/07 |
| 2 | FS1 and FS11 | 3 (4) | More robust efforts to be made to ensure that all children coming into care receive a looked after children pack and young person's guide. | 31/07/07 |
| 3 | FS9 and FS23 | 13, 17 (1), 17 (2) | A robust system to monitor, encourage and ensure that all foster carers attend training appropriate to the role they perform must be in place. | 31/12/07 |
| 4 | FS15 | 20 | Any correspondence including emails from a senior manager concerning permission for a member of staff to commence induction pre receipt of a CRB must be clear and make explicit that the person must not have contact with young people during this period. | 30/04/07 |
| 5 | FS22 | 28 (5) (C) Schedule 5 | All foster care agreements must state the foster carers full name and terms of approval and must refer to the correct regulations. | 30/04/07 |

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

| No. | Refer to Standard | Good Practice Recommendations |
|-----|-------------------|---|
| 1 | FS12 | The supervising social worker should check that foster carers understand the documentation they receive when a child is placed and that they have all the necessary permissions and authorisations for any child placed. Repeated from the report dated 13.02.06 |
| 2 | FS23 | Foster carers should be encouraged to maintain a training portfolio. Repeated from the report dated 13.02.06 |
| 3 | FS12 | Foster carers should be encouraged and reminded that National Minimum Standards recommend that they undertake first aid training. |
| 4 | FS6 | Within the record of the health and safety checks for foster carers it should be fully documented that annual gas servicing records have been examined and are up to date. |
| 5 | FS6 | The fostering service should, following appropriate research implement a system for the risk assessment of dogs/pets in foster carers homes. |
| 6 | FS6 | Staff carrying out health and safety checks should receive training appropriate to that role, and have a link to the authority's health and safety department for direct advice and guidance. |
| 7 | FS9 | Household safe care plans should be regularly reviewed and revisited each time a new placement is made. Additional individual risk assessments should be developed if required to supplement this. |
| 8 | FS9 | Where a young person requires intimate care for example young people using the short break service, an agreed care plan should be in place. This to be where applicable discussed with the young person, agreed and signed by the parent and foster carers. |
| 9 | FS16 | All staff should receive a structured induction to their role and should be line managed by a senior with experience of the role of the individual. |
| 10 | FS30 | To inform potential foster carers about panel and panel members: consider developing an information sheet with a photo giving some brief information about the panel members. For example; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The name and role of each person |

| | | |
|----|---------------|---|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A very short background |
| 11 | FS24 and FS25 | <p>Uniformity and consistency of foster carers files should be achieved.</p> <p>More robust audit systems are required for records and files of foster carers and young people.</p> |

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