

# inspection report

## Fostering Services

### **North Somerset Fostering Agency**

North Somerset Council  
Housing & Social Services  
Town Hall, P.O. Box 195  
Weston-Super-Mare  
North Somerset  
BS23 1UF

31st January – 7th February 2005

## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

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

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

### **The role of CSCI is to:**

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

## **Inspection Methods & Findings**

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

### **The 4-point scale ranges from:**

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

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

'9' in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not applicable.

'X' is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

## FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

**Local Authority Fostering Service?**

YES

**Name of Authority**

North Somerset Fostering Agency

**Address**

North Somerset Council, Housing & Social Services, Town Hall, P.O. Box 195, Weston-Super-Mare, North Somerset, BS23 1UF

**Local Authority Manager**

Sheila Cothers

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01934 888888

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Sheila. Crothers@n-somerset.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 ?**

YES

**Date of last inspection**

24-27  
Feb 2004

<b>Date of Inspection Visit</b>		31 <sup>st</sup> Jan – 7 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2005	<b>ID Code</b>
<b>Time of Inspection Visit</b>		09:30 am	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>1</b>	Carolle Wise Scanlan	135095
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>2</b>	David Francis	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>3</b>		
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>4</b>		
<b>Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable)</b> 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.			
<b>Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)</b>			
<b>Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection</b>		Sheila Crothers & Susan Nicholls	

**Introduction to Report and Inspection**

**Inspection visits**

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**Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State**

**Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection**

**Statutory Requirements from this Inspection**

**Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection**

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**(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)**

- 1. Statement of purpose**
- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
- 5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers**
- 6. Records**
- 7. Fitness of premises**
- 8. Financial requirements**
- 9. Fostering panels**
- 10. Short-term breaks**
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**D.1. Provider's comments**

**D.2. Action Plan**

**D.3. Provider's agreement**

## 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 North Somerset Fostering Agency. 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)
- Provider's 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.**

North Somerset Council became a unitary authority on 1 April 1996, The Family Placement and Family Link teams are part of the Children's Services Division of the Housing and Social Services Department.

The Family Placement team is based at Weston super Mare town hall. In the Autumn of 2004 the team was divided into three sections, recruitment, support and adoption. Each section is managed by a part-time team manager and there are 13 social work staff in total, some of whom work part-time. At the time of the inspection the service supported 72 foster carers looking after around 95 children and young people. The service has recently moved to a "payment for skills" scheme as a mechanism of recognising the different levels of foster care provided and as a means to encourage training and skill development.

The Family Link team is based in a separate office in Worle approximately three-miles from the town hall. It specifically provides families who provide support and respite for disabled children. It is separately managed, has 3 part time social workers and at the time of the inspection had 17 foster carers registered providing a service to 14 children.

## 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 inspection included both the Family placement and Family Link schemes. The inspectors undertook a survey of all carers and sent questionnaires to a sample of children and young people and placing social workers. They also undertook six visits to placements talk to carers and the children and young people who had been fostered. The inspectors also attended the Foster Panel and Foster Carers Forum and sampled a wide range of records, policies and procedures.

The outcome of the inspection was positive, with robust recruitment procedures for staff and carers in evidence. All sides have welcomed the switch to a "payment for skills" scheme and the training programme for carers was commended. Carers valued the support they had from their support workers although some expressed dissatisfaction with the approach of placing social workers.

The family placement scheme knows its weaknesses and had recently undertaken a review with external consultants. In particular the lack of placements and the need for greater variety had been noted. Restructuring has been put in place to address this. Although data is collected it is not collated and the department should consider how it would develop a quality assurance system. The family placement team is behind in completing annual reviews and must take action to address this. The Family Link scheme is a smaller enterprise and records indicate it is up to date.

The computer-based system appears inadequate and does not provide managers or staff with and effective management information and some administrative processes seem excessive and long winded, e.g. annual review reports.

Overall the service appeared sound with effective oversight and supervision of staff.

#### **Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)**

The standard which applies was assessed and was met. The statement of purpose was available and had been reviewed. A lot of effort had been put into making an attractive children's guide for the family placement service but the inspectors felt this should be reviewed again to check that the language is "child and young person" friendly.

The family link scheme is developing child friendly guides based on specific placements which include digital photographs of the carers and their families.



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

Both of the required standards were assessed and met. All the managers have extensive experience in their specialist fields. Some were undertaking open university management courses which they were finding helpful.

### **Management of the fostering service (Standards 4-5)**

The two standards assessed were met. The new structure creates clear lines of accountability for each part of the service and separate sections that can concentrate on different tasks. Whilst a lot of information is available it is not captured or utilised as a means of developing a quality assurance tool. This is something that should be considered.

### **Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14)**

8 of 8 standards assessed were met

It was positive to note that although the North Somerset population has a very limited ethnic minority representation, staff were open to the needs of individuals from different backgrounds and were thinking creatively about making links and seeking expertise. The need for carers to promote education, healthy lifestyles and contact with families was acknowledged and observed to be happening. Emphasis was given on child protection in policies and procedures and on carer's training programmes. Anti-bullying was also given emphasis.

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

8 of 9 standards assessed were met; 1 was exceeded and 1 almost met.

The recruitment procedures and record were sound and demonstrated a thorough and rigorous process of recruitment of carers.

The ongoing training of carers was excellent and the enthusiasm and commitment of those involved was evident. Feedback from carers demonstrated that they were feeling skilled and valued in their work. The support given placements from the family placement team was highly regarded by carers.

The one area of concern was the failure to review a large number of foster placements within the annual cycle and this needs to be addressed. Family Link carers are being reviewed annually.

### **Records (Standards 24-25)**

The standard assessed was met. Records were available as required and those sampled up to date and well maintained.

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

The standard assessed was almost met. The Family link scheme is awaiting an imminent move to improved premises. The Family Placement Team appears to be in cramped accommodation with one "dog legged room" which doesn't facilitate team-working. There is a lack of space for staff supervision and confidential meetings. Staff spoken to did not feel that the environment was a good one to work in.

### **Financial Requirements (Standards 27-29)**

The one standard assessed was met. Some foster carers expressed concern about delays

in obtaining re-imbursement, especially following emergency placements. Social services managers are aware of this and are putting in place an “upfront” payment scheme.

**Fostering panels (Standard 30)**

The standard assessed was met. The panel has an independent chairperson and effective and open debate was evident during the panel meeting. The quality assurance role of the panel has yet to be developed.

**Short Term Breaks (Standard 31)**

The standard assessed was met. The inspectors focussed on the Family Link arrangements where the emphasis on careful matching was noted. Arrangements for respite to ongoing Foster Placements was not inspected.

**Family and Friends as Carers (Standard 32)**

The standard assessed was met. It was recommended that the specific needs of kinship carers is given attention, for example, the possibility of a kinship carers support group.

## **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	
5	23	FS26	Ensure that the Family Link team have appropriate premises to operate from.  Note: New premise have been identified and await completion of building works, expected by early summer 2005	31 Dec 2004

**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.

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

**Lead Inspector****Signature****Second Inspector****Signature****Regulation Manager****Signature****Date**

## STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements are to be addressed. This action plan will be made available on request to the Area Office.

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children Act 1989, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, or the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The Authority or Registered Person(s) is/are required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for fostering services.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	29 (2)	FS21	A strategy is forwarded to the Commission to ensure all foster placements have a review at panel within a 12 month period. All placements should have had an annual review by 31 July 2005.	15 April 2005

### 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	The Children's guide for the Family Placement Scheme is reviewed to ensure that it is child/ young person friendly.
2	FS4	A clear procedure is developed to monitor and control the fostering services to ensure a quality performance

3	FS21	The annual review reports on carers are reviewed and streamlined focussing on the capability of the placements
4	FS32	The needs of kinship carers are reviewed. A support group for kinship carers might be considered.

\* Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix e.g FS10 refers to Standard 10.

## PART B INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS

The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Number of Inspector days spent	5
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	NA
• Contact with parents	YES
• 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	NA
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	NA
Date of Inspection	31/1/05
Time of Inspection	09.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	48

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?

3

There is written statement of purpose, a copy of which was kept on the premises for staff to access. The pre-inspection questionnaire states that each member of staff is given a copy of the statement of purpose and discussions with staff confirmed that they are aware of and he'd been consulted about the contents of this document. The statement of purpose has recently been updated and modified. The inspectors found that the statement of purpose did contain all the information set out under the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards Standard, including the number of complaints and their outcomes.

The 'Children's Guide' had been produced with input from children, which is good practice, as part of a working group. It was not felt to be as 'child-friendly' as it could be by the inspectors. In light of this the inspectors suggested that their comments could be forwarded to the working group for any future reviews. The presentation of the guides, called 'ME', was user friendly in a 'filofax style', packed with various contacts and information for the children who use the service. It would be interesting to see if further innovations develop from this working group regarding the guides such as an audio version, sign language, or a Braille version of the children's guide.

A specific guide was being developed for the family link scheme. This provided child-friendly information about link foster carers. The use of digital photographs made the guides accessible and personalised to the families concerned.

## 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

The managers hold professional qualifications relevant to working with children and have more than two years' experience of working with children within the past five years, as set out in Standard 2.2. Two managers are currently undertaking an Open University certificate in management qualification and 1 has completed a management course already. The responsible individual remains unchanged.

The inspectors found that the staff who directly supervise and support the foster carers are appropriately qualified social workers. The organisation of the team into three sections, recruitment, fostering and adoption was undertaken last October. The staff met from the recruitment and fostering sections during the inspection suggested that this had facilitated their work to be more focused. The staff were aware that the reorganisation would be reviewed and felt that their views would be valued regarding service delivery.

It was noted that each section held a smaller number of staff, if staff sickness or absence occurs its impact was greater than when in a larger general team. The feedback regarding effectiveness of leadership was that the whole team in its three sections still maintained an overview of the service.

The manager of the family link scheme had particular experience and knowledge about disabled children's services and her role includes the management of other resource services for disabled children which gives her an invaluable overview.

### 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

Three staff files were sampled and checked by an inspector against the information required under Schedule 1.

All held evidence of checks of positive proof of identity, which included a recent photograph. Also, all files held documentary proof of relevant qualifications and medical clearance with full written referencing taken up. There was evidence of the level of Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks undertaken on the files.

In a case where a member of staff is employed by the fostering service, the inspector noted

that there were application forms, job specifications and evidence of the interview process being undertaken, including equal opportunities.

It was interesting to note that the managers do not have details within the department of the CRB checks as these are all maintained within the personnel department. It is important to ensure that there is robust communication and that recruiting the managers have confirmation of CRB clearance and if necessary sight of the CRB. It was suggested that the personnel files would be better streamlined if all the recruitment information was kept together, as interview notes are filed separately at present.

## 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 service manager Mrs S Nicholls indicated that it is part of her role to monitor the performance of the service against identified targets together with the Deputy Director and Quality Assurance Manager Mr M Reay. The section team managers also play a part in ensuring quality and performance.

The monitoring of activities of the fostering service to ensure a quality performance includes supervising foster carers; annual reviews of foster carers' with use of some independent reviewing officers, staff training; regular reviews of placement plans via case review meetings, at least monthly foster home visits, monthly staff supervision; reviewing of complaints and incident report data, as well as panel minute reviews.

The inspectors found some evidence that carers' opinions are sought at the foster carer reviews, and at the 'Foster Carers Forum' but there was little evidence presented that service users' and families' opinions on the service or development of the service are sought or data collected in a more formalised way. Discussion with the manager and deputy director did not elicit concrete evidence that quality data collection systems are fully operational for various administrative reasons. The Local Authority has commissioned new IT programmes which are still being developed, which in practical terms has meant that the monitoring and performance data collection is still labour intensive. The managers met were already aware of these issues and are looking forward to developing further quality assurance initiatives. So at present there is no current 'framework' for producing a quality statement.

The inspectors found that there are clear roles for managers and staff and well-established lines of communication and of accountability between managers, staff and carers (evidenced from the pre-inspection questionnaire and discussions with the section team managers, staff and foster carers).

The family link scheme conduct annual surveys of their carers, but collated results were not available.

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

**X**

**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**

1

foster home.

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

1
1

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

X

**Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**

**The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

3

In discussion with the manager, the inspectors were informed that a job description setting out the duties and responsibilities for the managers exists and that it remains generic to the role despite the team being in sections. Discussion with the manager, 1 section team manager, and several staff, indicated that they are clear about the lines of accountability and delegation of responsibility within these roles.

At the start of the inspection, staff who met the inspectors were clear about deputising arrangements in the absence of the section managers. The pre-inspection questionnaire documents that the management is shared between 3 part-time team managers who cover for each other. In the event of all three being unavailable the team would refer to the Service manager for Provider services.

The Family Link service has small and tight knit team with experienced staff who can effectively cover for each other.

## 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

The pre-inspection questionnaire states that the methods outlined in last years inspection report still stand. These included policies and procedures for recruitment and assessment. Periodic recruitment drives involving various forms of marketing. A 'mentor' scheme is now in place in which an approved foster carer is also available to support potential foster carer/s through the process of training, assessment and panel should they wish it. Foster carers are visited in their homes at least monthly where all practical issues regarding accommodation; health and safety etc. are investigated in an initial screening process. Discussion with a recruiting social worker indicated that a home safety check is carried out as part of the foster carer recruitment process. Health and safety is discussed during the preparatory foster carers training course.

Developments towards valuing foster carers have been the 'Payment for Skills' scheme introduced in April 2004. This offers progression for carers through three levels of reward payment, linked to skills development and training.

The Foster Carers Forum has been established for a year now and is a consultative representative group of foster carers and professionals from the fostering service who meet 3 monthly with a preliminary meeting set up prior to each meeting. One inspector attended this Forum was very impressed with the excellent levels of communication between all members in attendance. It lent itself to an open and honest forum with lively debates, all discussions were minuted and distributed to foster carers and made available to the professionals involved in foster services.

Checks on a sample of foster carer files showed that a generalised home safety checklist is completed. There was no indication of any written home risk management plan following any hazards identified from the checks lists, although where a need for specialist equipment was identified this was generally recorded and actions taken to address this through a 'loan' system.

The placing social workers who returned the placing social worker questionnaires relating to a placement said they considered the child to be safe in this placement. There was evidence from file checks, discussion with staff and observation of the foster panel that safety issues are also discussed when reviews of foster homes are undertaken.

When the inspectors visited a sample of foster carers to discuss the service, it was observed that the foster homes were homely and well maintained. Discussions with foster carers both in a group and individual situations, elicited evidence that home safety checks and individual risk assessments are undertaken by the fostering service. Foster carers were aware that they may be interviewed as part of the Commission's inspection process and cooperated fully with this.

**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 questionnaire notes that the fostering service promotes diversity and anti-discriminatory practice with the training it provides for foster carers. The recruitment section is focusing on increasing the number of black and ethnic minority carers through targeted advertising. The service has a manual entitled 'It's a start' providing information on religious, cultural, linguistic and racial needs.

The inspectors were told by the recruiting social workers that the induction training programme for prospective foster carers includes elements on valuing diversity and respect for children's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background. The inspectors were not able to observe delivery of this training at the time of the inspection. The training plan for 2005 does contain a course on 'Dealing with Discrimination'.

At the foster panel it was identified that a child in foster care might not have developed their linguistic skills to offer a clear view of their opinions and that there was insufficient cultural information about the child's background and community. The need to obtain further specialist advice in respect of cultural issues was identified.

The inspectors were advised that as part of the development of the fostering service a 'marketing' post was to be advertised. This would assist the service in ensuring that the demographics of the foster carers in the area and that of the children needing the service are not only identified but that recruitment and marketing are then driven to meet these needs.

The family link scheme pays particular attention to matching children with disabilities to appropriate carers and ensuring communication needs are anticipated and if necessary specific training provided.

**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**

Written information on the placement process was seen in a copy of the foster carers' handbook. From this and discussion with staff and foster carers, it was seen that it is the role of the foster care support social workers to identify carers who are able to meet the child's needs in terms of both behaviour and medical support required. Interviews with staff and foster carers confirmed this process. The childcare social workers offer more complete information about the child to enable the foster carer to prepare for the initial introductory visit. It was evident however that 2 recent placements had been made outside of categories approved for. Some placements made committed foster carers to be over numbers. At the time of the inspection matching was proving difficult as there were insufficient placements to meet demand.

The foster support section has weekly meetings to discuss and explore the placements and

every effort is made achieve match but they are restricted to the vacancies available. When talking to some foster carers they said that in some cases the child's profile had not given them all the information they felt they needed at the beginning of the placement. It was noted that this tended to occur with emergency placements.

In interviews some foster carers told the inspectors that specific training needs are identified prior to placement and that any necessary training, for example, rectal diazepam, is given before the carers begin to care for the child on their own. However in some cases the training has taken place after the placement, such as care of diabetes. The family Link service was noted to provide training and adaptations before and during the placement offering support to the family link carers.

#### **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**

The pre-inspection questionnaire noted that the recruitment section are 'establishing a more formalised system of assessment of foster carers and children' which will be in handbook form as a measure to ensure that the fostering service has systems in place to protect children from abuse.

Meeting with the staff from the recruitment section it is evident that the preparation course includes elements of child protection procedures, safe caring skills and anti-discrimination. Following the successful completion of this course an assessment process is undertaken and any further training and development needs are discussed on an individual basis. There is an annual training programme, which utilises the skills of local professionals and specialists. This address such issues as nutrition, bereavement, self-harming behaviours and teenage pregnancies. This programme is circulated to all the foster carers and includes joint training with social work staff as good practice.

There is a policy on bullying contained within the policy and procedures and regular training on bullying is held. The fostering agreement and foster carers handbook state explicitly that corporal punishment/treatments are not permitted. Those questionnaires returned to the CSCI and the carers met by the inspectors demonstrated the foster carers awareness and full understanding of this agreement. There is a written procedure for foster carers to use if the foster child is missing from their care and this is included in the copy of the foster carer handbook. There is also a draft procedure manual in which new joint procedures with the police have been established and all carers have a copy. The sharing of information with carers and children is set down in the LAC Manual section 2.3.

It is the manager's role to collate and evaluate information on the circumstances, number and outcome of any allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in foster care. In order to assess that these policies are adhered to the managers note on the pre inspection questionnaire that 'the primary responsibility lies with the commissioning child- care social workers who are required to visit and listen to children on a regular basis'. The foster carers are encouraged to 'request help if they feel that they are having difficulty managing a child so that any risk of contravening the policy can be addressed.'

**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 service is clear that foster carers are expected to support and facilitate contact in accordance with the child's care plan. Foster carers are encouraged to bring their concerns re contact to the attention of the child's social worker and their link worker. There are policies and guidance in place to promote contact between children and their families such their 'guide to fostering' 'sharing care' and the LAC Manual 2.3.3. Risk assessments are undertaken regarding arrangements for contact by the child's social worker. If supervision is required this may be arranged using the Community Care Workers (they are employees of the local authority who undertake support and task centred work with children and families).

Contact details were found on 2 of the care plans and placement agreements seen. On meeting some foster carers, it was evident that the contact arrangements at times appeared to be 'a little hit and miss'. It was seen by many as one of the most disruptive aspects of foster caring, as the arrangements may change with very little, if any notice at times. Foster carers receive training during the preparation course on managing contact and the importance of it. Those met and those returning feedback felt that the communication of the contact arrangements could be improved, to ensure that the foster carers and all the children in their care could make safe, timely arrangements. Communication of the contact arrangements is led by the care plan and the child care social workers, who should inform the parents/family, foster carer and child, and the foster support social workers if there are changes made to any set arrangements.

If there is an expense incurred by the foster carer facilitating the contact arrangements there is financial support provided in the form of expenses.

One kinship carer spoken to had found it difficult to separate out her role as carer from that as family member and had felt compromised when she had tried to arrange parental contact on the children's' behalf. In such circumstances it is important to be clear about what kinship carers feel comfortable with taking on.

**Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)**

**The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.**

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

The annual reviews of the foster care placement are produced to gather and collate the views of the child and of the placement.

Foster carers' annual reviews are not carried out by Independent Reviewing Officers. The consultation procedure is that consultation documents are sent to the foster carers, children, parents and Independent Reviewing Officers to complete. These review meetings are carried out by the 'Adoption and Fostering Link worker' who produces a report presented to panel together with the consultation papers. These reviews are presented to panel who provide the independent element in making recommendations regarding registration.

During the inspection and as noted in the Foster Carer Forum, several foster carers felt that

they did not receive a consultation document pre the Looked After Children's review, several noted that the reviewer nor the social worker brought the last review report with them and therefore were not aware of the recommendations made at the last review, the foster carers supplied them with their copies. These concerns were minuted for further action and an appraisal of the review procedure.

Because of the communication difficulties that many of the users of the service have, information about their views is difficult to obtain but foster support workers do observe children and young people in the foster homes as a means of assessing suitability of care and may also use feedback from parents to assess if the child is happy with the service provided.

Children/Young person's questionnaires were sent to children/young people with a covering letter to try to ascertain their views about the service. The CSCI had 4 returned responses these indicated a good degree of satisfaction with the service. It was interesting to note that 2 felt that their opinion had been asked for regarding the fostering service and 2 did not.

The children/young people do have access to the advocacy service 'PAIRS' Participation And Independent Rights Service. It is a project of the Children's Society, an independent charity, the details of which are found in the children's guide. There is also a complaints process outlined in the children's guide.

#### **Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)**

**The fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, together with information and training appropriate to her/his age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about her/his health needs.**

#### **Key Findings and Evidence**

#### **Standard met?**

**3**

The monitoring of health checks are the responsibility of the commissioning teams. The foster carers register the children with a local GP, Dentist etc and any appointments made are recorded.

The child's profile when completed should ensure that comprehensive information about health and care needs is obtained, for example, information on medical diagnosis, allergies, illnesses, immunisations, medical alerts, medication taken, any other medical conditions, information about seizures or physical and sensory disabilities, any specific aids or equipment required, lifting and handling requirements, communication needs, dietary needs, general personal care requirements and registered health practitioners is requested. There is a health record book for each looked after child. North Somerset has a new policy on the Health of Children 'Looked After' written by a multi-agency group, including foster carers.

The 'Consult' service provides a consultation between social services, Education and Child and Adolescent Services in order to establish specific relevant interventions regarding the support needed for a specific child, an assessment or any further training need indicated for the foster carer.

Foster carer questionnaire responses indicate that several foster carers had received first aid training.

**Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)**

**The fostering service gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person in foster care and ensures that she/he is encouraged to attain her/his full potential.**

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

Foster carers have a role in school contact and ensure that children attend school with the necessary equipment. The foster carers handbook notes the costs carers are expected to meet in relation to uniforms etc. Foster carers have access to the Education Department, Looked After Children's Support Team, including EWO, an Educational Psychologist and specialist teachers.

As noted in the last inspection the authority can also provide educational support in the form of home tutoring, as part of the 'Quality Protects' grant. Computers can be provided for those children over the age of 11 years, with supportive training and back up for the foster carers. The foster carers met by the inspectors were able to demonstrate clearly how much they were involved in actively encouraging even the smallest level of achievement/attainment made by the children placed with them. Every effort is made by all those involved to encourage the children/young people to attain their full potential.

**Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****0**

Not assessed.

## 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

There is a written recruitment policy and procedure. File sampling of 3 records showed that, these were followed. They included application forms, references, medical checks, Criminal Record Bureau checks (records kept in personnel), equal opportunities, photographs, identity checks and interview data. Discussion with staff showed that the written recruitment and appointment procedures are followed. Three file checked at the Family Link scheme were similarly robust.

The staff are suitably qualified and experienced social workers undertaking the foster carer assessments. They are directly line managed and supervised in their work by the fostering support team manager who is also an experienced and qualified social worker. The same can be said of the recruitment section social workers, which are line managed by the recruitment section team manager. The Family Link scheme is managed separately from the mainstream adoption and fostering team to ensure, according to the manager, priority is given to a service for disabled children.

Total number of staff of the agency:

X

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

X

### 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 management structure in place with clear lines of accountability. In discussion with several foster support and recruitment social workers it was indicated that, in the past, individual caseloads had not had an upper limit, but were seen as being evenly distributed. The managers are responsible for allocating and monitoring the caseloads of the staff. The re organisation of the team into the three sections has led to a more focused service provision. The 'duty desk' role is undertaken by one staff member, on a permanent basis, generally freeing up the remainder of the team to undertake their various roles. Unfortunately the inspectors did not meet with this staff member during the inspection. As a contingency, in the absence of the duty desk staff member, the foster support team backfill the role on a rota basis, but it has time implications for the foster support team.

Foster carers indicated that they felt generally well supported by the foster team in both recruitment and support and commented positively on their commitment to their work, but also expressed some concerns. The concerns lay in communication, workloads of the staff 'considering their workload, they do a fantastic job' and lack of continuity between social workers.

Inspection of a sample of foster carers files and discussion with foster carers indicated that training portfolios are being maintained. The foster carers questionnaires indicated that appropriate training is been offered and taken up by the foster carers. The staff and managers feel that since the 'payment for skills' initiative was commenced the take up of training has improved.

In the family placement team clerical and administrative support is provided in an L shaped office, which was not ideal. The social workers during discussion did note some administrative work they currently undertake but could be offered to the administration team. During feedback it was noted that due to some sickness the staff had been making up recruitment packs etc, however a request for admin support within the organisation had already been made.

Discussion with staff indicated that employees are provided with appropriate written contracts, job descriptions and conditions of service. The staff generally receive monthly supervision and are to start group supervision on a less frequent basis in the near future. Staff also receive copies of the annual training plan and have appraisals.

#### **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**

The fostering and Family Link service has a recruitment policy and strategy aimed at recruiting a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people with special needs. In the discussion with various staff we talked about how they provide information from referrals about needs/services required to ensure that recruitment can be targeted to provide the carers who will have the skills and experience to meet those needs. It appears that since the recruitment section has been set up there is now data available on a month by month basis noting the numbers of enquiries made, if these enquiries are not taken up a follow up letter is sent, the service also sends out a questionnaire to survey why the enquiry was not pursued. The service is also to appoint a marketing person to assist with the recruitment process looking at all the extraneous variables affecting the recruitment process and hopefully assist in addressing any difficulties if found.

The managers continue to monitor any staff vacancies of which at the time of the inspection there were none, as well as sickness absence and any workload issues.

**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?****3**

Out of hours management and support are available for foster carers through the on call emergency duty system. The foster carers in addition to this also have access to a dedicated out of hours support service provided by 'Next Step'.

It was noted from some foster carers feedback when they felt they needed support and it was not provided was usually when 'their' link worker was on holiday, or if difficulties arose and the link worker 'works part-time, but as foster carers we work 24/7'.

There are management systems for carer supervision, appraisal and support through telephone contact, mentoring, home visits and review (evidenced through documentation and discussion with staff and foster carers). The recruiting social workers undertake the assessments of foster carers; thereafter the foster carers have a foster support social worker. The inspectors attended a meeting of the foster panel where foster carer review reports were considered and recommendations on continued approval were made by the foster panel. Discussions with staff indicated that they felt well supported by the manager through this process with individual supervision and group meetings.

There is a whistle blowing policy in place, which is made known to all staff and carers.

**Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)**

**There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.**

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****0**

Not assessed.

**Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**

**All staff are properly accountable and supported.**

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

In discussions, staff confirmed that they have detailed job descriptions and are given copies of the policies and procedures. Individual and group discussion with the manager and staff confirmed that all staff who come into contact with foster carers and prospective foster carers and children/young people receive supervision from their manager. Staff supervision notes are written by the manager and kept securely. Supervision sessions are monthly and generally planned in advance.

The inspector attended one of the regular staff team meetings held in the office, minutes were taken contemporaneously onto the computer system and mailed to each team member. The staff met by the inspectors felt well supported by their managers and there was a clear sense of a team spirit.

**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?****2**

Documentation for foster panel and foster carer file checks indicated that in some cases reviews were not undertaken within the required intervals of not more than a year. It appeared that 30 of the 74 foster placements were overdue; some reviews were in excess of 6 months overdue. This is partly due the recent restructuring and staff turnover but must be addressed. From sampling files it appeared that all Family Link carers were reviewed within the required timescale, but there was no system in place for tracking this.

Responses to the foster carer survey questionnaire and group and individual discussions with foster carers showed that they clearly feel supported by the foster link support workers, but that communication could be improved regarding contact issues. In the foster carer questionnaire, a number of carers commented that “more out of hours support” would be useful; ‘consistency’ of staff and ‘improved communication’ would improve the service. It became evident during the inspection that some of the communication issues lie between the child’s social worker, the foster carer and the foster support link worker. This was already understood by the staff and managers alike and some joint working initiatives are at the planning stages currently in an attempt to address this, which is excellent practice. The last inspection reported that monitoring of the Looked After Children’s paperwork offered to foster carers by the fostering service persists to good effect.

**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**

Foster carers are given a copy of the service’s foster carer handbook; this contains a copy of the standard foster carer agreement as well as information on the service’s policy, procedures, guidance, legal information and insurance. The foster Care Agreement sets out their terms and conditions of service. Information regarding the complaints procedure is available to all and records are maintained regarding allegations and complaints. In the event that an allegation is made the foster carer is offered an independent person to support them.

Foster carers receive a home visit at least monthly or according to the number and frequency of placements for family link workers. At least once each year, there should be an unannounced visit. Checks on foster carer files did not easily demonstrate that this is done. Information about the complaints procedures is included in the foster carer handbook. The inspectors are informed that information regarding procedures into investigating allegations and supporting foster carers during an investigation is dealt with in pre-approval training. A ‘mentoring’ scheme has been set up with experienced foster carers offering mentoring to newly recruited potential foster carers.

As stated earlier in the report the foster carers have access to the emergency out of hour’s duty team, Next Step supporting care leavers, and the Consult service.

The Payments for Skills scheme recognises foster carers achievements and those with extra skills and training. The foster carers also have an Award Ceremony.

The family link scheme aims to ensure that there is a minimum of one visit every three months. Contact sheets in the carer's files demonstrated this happening.

**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?**

4

Currently, the induction training programme for prospective foster carers is based on the Fostering Network "Choosing To Foster" course and is delivered by the recruiting social workers. The carers in the Family Link Scheme complete the 'When I Come to Stay' training course. File tracking and discussion with carers did not elicit evidence that appropriate training on safe caring is provided for all members of the foster household.

An annual training plan is developed in response to the needs of the service and its carers. Specific training on rectal diazepam for a family link worker was identified as an example of good practice. The inspectors were informed that approved carers also receive training on first aid, moving and handling and health and safety. Training on child protection is included in the "Choosing To Foster" course. Discussion with foster carers showed that training on managing behaviour is also given. However, the inspectors found, in one case, that carer had a child with diabetes placed with them before they had undertaken any specific training, this has been provided now is was to the foster carers satisfaction.

The training program seen by the inspectors utilised the skills and knowledge from a local base of various health and social care professionals, it incorporated joint training with the foster carers and social workers and on occasion a young person was involved, which the trainer would like continue. The Payment for Skills scheme assisted in the numbers of carers taking up the training, which includes NVQ. It was noted that all the carers wishing to undertake the course had this facilitated, which is to the credit of the trainer and the fostering service. The training department holds all the relevant data with regard to the training offered, those who attended, or did not, cancellations and it issues certificates. The department can on request of the social worker forward the foster carers training profile/portfolio, for their annual review. It was suggested that the information was not currently requested that often, which was fed back to the management team. The inspectors felt that the training program and its continued success to be commendable.

British Sign Language training had been funded for one family link carer in order to meet the needs of a specific placement.



## 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?

0

Not assessed.

### 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

Separate records are kept for staff, carers and children. The inspectors reviewed records of complaints and allegations. All records within the office were securely stored in lockable cabinets, with password protected computers and security systems for the building.

The inspectors found that some case note records were not always up to date on the file however when investigated further it came to light that the foster support social workers kept the most recent information within their brief cases until they attend the office then they transfer the information. At the end of the inspection the case files contained all the current details of the monthly contact/visits and events.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:

X

Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:

X

Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:

X

Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:

X

Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:

X

Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £

X

Maximum £

X

## Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

2

Offices are open during normal office hours.

There is a lift access for disabled users in the Town Hall offices. The fostering service team managers do not each have an office, which would be useful for supervision sessions. When the foster support team have a weekly meeting they may be subject to interruption due to the office set up.

The premises to be used by the Family Link Team are nearing completion. The proposal is that subject to no further delays they may be ready within the next four weeks. Access is restricted using a building security system.

## Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

#### Standard met?

0

Not assessed.

### Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

#### Standard met?

0

Not assessed.

**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**

Payment for Skills Scheme has been successfully implemented. The foster support team inform the finance department of any new or changed placements to ensure carers receive prompt appropriate payments. Any placement made to a foster agency is also forwarded by the foster support team.

The foster carers comments from some of the feedback received to the CSCI is that expenses payments can be slow and the foster carers feel they have to follow this up constantly. The managers advised the inspectors that the finance department did have some staffing issues for a period of time, which they felt impacted on this. They felt that generally this had now been resolved but would monitor it further.

One foster child was very concerned that additional money promised for their carer at a review had not been forthcoming and he felt "awkward" about causing the carer additional expense.

## 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
<p>The inspectors did not see the service's written policy and procedures for the foster panel about the handling of their functions.</p> <p>The inspectors met with the chair, who described the panel's policy and procedures as based on the guidance for fostering panels published by the British Agency for Fostering and Adoption (BAAF). The inspectors were told that panel members have been CRB checked and have received training. A check on one lay panel member found this to be the case. The independent members present at the panel session observed by the inspectors included expertise in education and health. One of the independent members was a person who had been placed with foster carers and another a foster carer. The minutes of the last 12 panel meetings were noted to be quorate.</p> <p>The chair of the panel encouraged open discussion and it was noted that most members contributed in varying degrees to any debate. Clear boundaries were established towards the end of the discussion about each foster care placement, any recommendations and requests for further information were agreed by all. The panel's decision is forwarded in the form of recommendations to the Assistant Director of Social Services, who undertakes the final decision making role.</p> <p>It had been noted that the annual foster care reviews contained long narratives which the inspectors felt unnecessary. These were focussed on the placement information rather than an evaluation of carer's capabilities, and could be streamlined. However several panel members felt that it was important to have as much information, in as much detail as possible, in order to make judgements based on fact. Others could see that the narrative may lead the panel to discuss the child's placement rather than the foster carers skills and abilities to support the placement.</p> <p>There appeared to the inspectors to still be some work to do regarding quality assurance and the panel's role within this. The chair has been focusing and developing one aspect of the foster panel at a time and will be looking towards a quality review of the process in the near future.</p>		

## 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 Family Link scheme provides short-term break services for children with disability. The recruitment training and support of the Family Link carers is undertaken separately to that of the fostering and adoption team to take account of the needs of the children requiring the service. However they are invited to attend the training program offered to the foster carers thereafter, with any specialist or medical training specific to the individual child's needs. The carers undergo the same approval process as other foster carers, and the annual review is taken to panel.

The inspector met with a parent and young person who has a family link placement, and one of the family link carers. The placement and family link service was noted by all parties to be very successful. The parents are more involved in the process of setting up and agreeing the placements with many arranging directly with the carers the details and information regarding their child. This sharing of information is again two-ways and the carers provide feedback on a one-one basis about what they all did during the 'respite stay'. The young person was able to describe with some assistance from mum those things most enjoyed about the link workers, home, surrounding, family pets and friends and their stay at their home. The content, detail, and the non-verbal communication offered during the description, demonstrated that the family link placement was seen as a positive experience and something to look forward to.

There was felt to be a shortage of Family Link workers and it was noted that should any placement end, there would be a delay in finding another. The feedback from the parents of those who have children placed was that the service was good, however there had been a notable lack of social worker support for the parents at times, this has now been resolved. The Family Link carers are invited to bring any issues to the foster carer forum.

There is a respite scheme for short term breaks to be provided for families and foster carers. On this occasion this was not inspected.

## Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The kinship carers are assessed to see if the needs of the specific child/children can be safely met. They are approved by the fostering panel to provide specific care, to a named child or children. It is stated that kinship placements are to be explored by social workers when considering the need for a child to be fostered according to the social workers guidance.

The inspector met with a 'kinship' carer during the process of the inspection. The carer felt under supported at times by the service, and to be a 'second rate foster carer' as she was excluded from "payment for skills". Although training was offered she had difficulty in making herself available because of the demands on her as a carer. She said would welcome contact and support with other family link carers as she felt family link carers had specific needs e.g. maintaining the placement whilst being caught up in the middle family dynamics.

**PART C**

**LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY**

**(where applicable)**

**Lay Assessor**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_



**D.1 Registered Person's or Responsible Local Authority Manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.**

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

YES

Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate

**Note:**

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

**D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 21<sup>st</sup> April 2005, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.**

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

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

Other: <enter details here>

**Public reports**

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

### D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

**Registered Person's or responsible Local Authority Manager's statement of agreement/comments: Please complete the relevant section that applies.**

**D.3.1 I Mr Steve Tanner of North Somerset Fostering Agency, North Somerset Council, Housibg and Social Services, PO Box 52, Town Hall, Weston Super Mare, Somerset, BS23 1ZY confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.**

Print Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature**

### Designation

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Or**

**D.3.2 I Mr Steve Tanner of North Somerset Fostering Agency, North Somerset Council, Housibg and Social Services, PO Box 52, Town Hall, Weston Super Mare, Somerset, BS23 1ZY 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:**

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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**  
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