



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

North Somerset Fostering Agency

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

Lead Inspector
Carolle Wise Scanlan

Announced Inspection
17 January 2006 09:30

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 North Somerset Fostering Agency

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Housing & Social Services
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Weston-Super-Mare
North Somerset
BS23 1UF

Telephone number 01934 888888

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Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) North Somerset Council

Name of registered manager (if applicable)

Type of registration Local Auth Fostering Service

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 31st January 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

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.

A full time team manager now manages both the recruitment and support sections. There are two recruitment social work staff and five supervising social workers in total, some of which work part-time and one full time duty social worker. At the time of the inspection the service supported 82 foster carers with 4 new carers approved just prior to the inspection, taking the number to 86, looking after around 119 children and young people.

Since the last inspection the service has created the position of a part-time development Manager in order to undertake specific implementation and compliance tasks, such as the Placement Strategy.

The service operates 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 Adoption and Fostering service has appointed a Recruitment and Marketing officer.

The Family Link team is based in a separate office in Weston Court a few miles from the Town Hall. It specifically provides short break and shared care for disabled children. It is separately managed; pre-inspection information provided by the manager stated that this area of the service currently provides care for 18 children, with a waiting list of approximately 10.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection took place over a period of nine days with two inspectors, Carrolle Wise-Scanlan and Deborah Turner. The inspection was undertaken as the statutory annual inspection of the Fostering and Family Link Service.

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

The support and training was well perceived by the majority of the carers met and surveyed.

Each foster carer was sent a questionnaire by the commission to complete, however; only eight 'mainstream' and one family link carer chose to comment.

Nine children and young people chose to complete the forwarded questionnaires. Thirteen childcare social workers returned completed questionnaires; questionnaires are very child and placement specific. An issue most often highlighted by social workers in the returned questionnaires was about promoting family contact.

What the service does well:

Social workers had set up supervision contracts with the foster carers, supervision generally takes place four weekly with regular telephone or email contact in the interim periods.

The Foster Carer Forum met during the process of this inspection, and the two inspectors were able to attend the meeting and observe the meeting. Lively debate and constructive discussion that took place between those foster carers present and managers of the fostering service. Service managers were receptive to ideas and had responded to questions posed and ideas shared by the foster carers who are members of the forum. The forum was being utilised to develop practice and policies through joint working and collaboration.

Payments for Skills has improved training attendance and the numbers of NVQ Level 3 qualified carers has increased with this initiative. Its success however and its future strategy with recruitment and retention of carers is in need of further development.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Foster carers annual reviews are now pre planned where possible at least two months in advance by the fostering administrator. Documentation prepared for panel has notes of when documents were forwarded and of reminders sent allowing for quality monitoring and auditing of the process.

Family Link have their own premises at Weston Court, which are more appropriate to their size and need.

The Children's guide had been revised, during its annual review in consultation with children and young people; and its new format is child and young person friendly. The newly revised format seen by inspectors had yet to be sent out to children.

The foster carers annual review now also includes the views of any children placed within the last twelve months and where appropriate their parents are also invited to contribute to the review via placement evaluation questionnaires.

Work is in progress to develop a more streamline and succinct foster carer annual review format, with particular emphasis on the skills of the carer.

Although there currently is no support group specifically for kinship carers this is being considered. The service has devised a kinship care policy and guidance since the last inspection.

An improvement was seen with Placement planning meetings and disruption meetings.

What they could do better:

There were eleven foster carers at the time of the inspection that exceeded three placements. Measures are in place to recruit foster carers to meet the 'gap' noted for foster carers who can meet the needs of adolescent young people.

Children's placement plans that form the basis of the placement agreement and are part of the Looked After Children documentation should be in place for all placements prior to the child's arrival; and in the event an emergency placement as soon thereafter as possible.

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

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

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Being Healthy

The intended 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 at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

All efforts are made by the Fostering service to ensure that children placed with their foster carers continue to receive any medical treatment or specialist care they might require. However, some monitoring of this is required in order to ensure consistency and safe practice.

EVIDENCE:

The foster carers of one child placed with diabetes had received training from the specialist nurse with guidance on diet and giving injections. Another had attended paediatric visits and had received and researched the child's health condition with the support of the supervising social worker, to ensure that the child's health and well being was being managed effectively.

The fostering team assert that it remains the responsibility of the commissioning childcare social workers to monitor health checks.

Child health records were in place with the majority of foster carers visited by inspectors during this visit. Foster carers are expected to keep a record of a child's health needs in a separate log.

Foster carers generally found that the written information with regard to the child being placed was reliant on the childcare social workers. Some of the information was noted to only be being shared verbally and therefore this has the potential to lead to shortfalls and mis-communication.

In one respite placement there was no specific medical consent agreed for those carers. The carer offering respite to a child placed had to request medical information following the placement and had not met the child's social

worker. There was no named 'specific' consent in place in the event that emergency or routine medical treatment might be required.

The Family link carers visited had been provided with written permission from parents to administer homely remedies if required.

First aid training is provided within the initial foster carer training and induction. Details of the training offered demonstrated good practice with subjects such as communicable diseases and sexual health being addressed.

Foster carers are aware of their role in ensuring that access to all health and allied professionals is available to the children in their care. Evidence was seen to confirm that foster carers provide health information for the planning and review process. However, the process of forwarding this information was felt at times to cause confusion, or the need to duplicate and this process was discussed at the Foster Carer Forum. This is currently being looked at by the quality Service Manager.

A number of external support mechanisms existed for foster carers, for example mental health support from organisations such as CONSULT.

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 at least once during a 12 month period.

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30

Suitably qualified and experienced staff manage the fostering service.

Safeguards are in place to ensure that foster carers provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for the children placed in their care.

In matching of placements for children account is taken of the individual needs of the child and the skills of the foster carer. Efforts are required to ensure that foster carers do not regularly exceed approved numbers.

Through training and information sharing the fostering service provide proper protection for children.

Staff recruitment procedures were satisfactory.

The fostering panel membership had a range of policies and procedures for guidance and application. Policies and terms of reference existed to safeguard the welfare of children.

EVIDENCE:

North Somerset Foster Service Manager (Provider Services) has the relevant management qualifications and experience in working with children.

The Fostering Team Manager, who manages the recruitment and supervising support social workers, holds a Diploma in Social Work and Certificate in Management Studies.

Staff files are retained within the personnel department three files were sampled and checked by an inspector against the information required under Schedule 1. These were in order.

The Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks undertaken are held in accordance with the CRB code of practice, those records appertaining to the fostering service are held separately for auditing purposes. Personnel advised that interview notes are held for one year. Each record reviewed contained application forms including equal opportunities, job description, which the 'job evaluation analysts' review and the staff contracts post probationary period.

Satisfactory safeguarding of children was demonstrated with foster carers receiving preparation training, robust staff recruitment, and via the 'listening to children' training. Records are stored appropriately. Staff ensure that regular home visits are undertaken and that they liaise with the commissioning childcare social workers. They complete foster carer reviews ensuring that they consult with children and parents. A 'mentor' scheme is now firmly part of the recruitment and selection process for foster carers. Pre Placement risk assessment forms have been revised and capture essential information concerning risks potential and perceived that aid in the placing of individual children and young people.

A new 'Guide to Fostering' is being produced. A smoking policy regarding foster carers is in place.

A new Policy and Development Manager post has been created to address and ensure that the fostering service best practice is reflected in its policies and procedures.

A Recruitment and Marketing officer has been appointed to assist in the recruitment of foster carers and people wishing to adopt. This is in line with the Authority's recruitment strategy. This role will include identifying areas in which specific carers are needed and how to meet this need.

Foster homes are assessed as part of the recruitment social workers role to ensure that they can provide a safe, clean and comfortable environment ensuring privacy for the child looked after and others within the household. As part of the foster carers initial training aspects of health and safety are

covered. It was clear during the Foster Carer Forum that the training updates also lead to lively debates with regard to 'how far' are risk avoidance methods needed. One carer felt that the recent update had led her to request a fire blanket.

Two approved carers linked to the short break shared care family link service were visited as part of this inspection process. Children receiving this service each had accommodation provided that was considered as suitable to meet their assessed need during their pre-arranged, short stay with the carer. A member of the shared care team had assessed the carer's homes and completed safety checks. These safety checks had been reviewed annually where applicable.

Both carers were familiar with the specialist needs of the children in their care and had taken steps to minimise any risks within the home and immediate environment.

Carers had been provided with disability training where this was required.

Foster carers understood that the Commission may wish to visit and interview them and fully co-operated with this, however most did not have an understanding of the Commissions role.

Parents receiving a service from the family link team had been willing to wait for this service, as they felt that the efforts made to correctly match their child to an individual carer had been successful in providing a suitable and stable care package both for them and their child.

Records examined by inspectors confirmed that careful matching processes had been undertaken for all children case tracked as part of the inspection of the family link service.

Essential information about the child had been obtained from parents and had been provided to the family link carer.

Records examined confirmed that all those children case tracked as part of the inspection of the family link service had had a period of introduction. This introductory process had been suited to the individual needs of the child and their family. Family link carers and parents stated that they felt this process had been crucial to the success or failure of any placement.

The inspectors met with children using the service. The inspectors were able to confirm with some of the children that they enjoyed staying with their chosen family link carer.

Interviews with staff within the mainstream fostering service confirmed that the role of 'matching' carers and children lies with the duty desk social worker and the foster care supervising social workers. It was evident, however that some placements had been made outside of approved registration. Some placements made committed foster carers to be over numbers and outside the panel approved age range. A few foster carers providing mainstream services stated in their pre-inspection questionnaires that they had felt 'pressurised' to accept placements.

At the time of the inspection the fostering service was able to provide carer choice for those children needing short-term respite care. There is a need for foster carers who can care for adolescents. A total of twenty-two children were placed with Fostering Agencies with sixteen outside of North Somerset as of January 2006. Several social care staff stated that they felt that this lack of available resources affects the services ability match individual children to carers.

In planned placements referrals are made to the foster team duty officer, to seek a foster carer for specific placements. If a placement with a foster carer has not been found, the duty officer updates the childcare social worker on a weekly basis, following the support section team meeting. Once a placement is identified the foster carer is encouraged to discuss the needs of the child with the childcare social worker. A planning meeting is arranged to which the foster carer is invited. Following this, introductions are made and the placement commences. In unplanned placements an in-house foster carer is sought, or alternatively an Independent Fostering Agency this takes place with agreements made from the appropriate service managers. The child is placed with the placement plan agreement and other documentation. A planning meeting is set for seven days after the placement is made. Records demonstrated some good practice in this area.

'Matching' is considered at the initial stages by the duty desk officer and at the 'section meetings'. The foster carer support social worker takes account of written assessments of the child, family and the foster carers abilities and registration approval. Although this was generally in evidence during the inspection there was no single 'matching documentation' that forms a paper trail.

The procedure followed when a foster carer is deemed to be an appropriate match is that this is discussed with the relevant supervising social worker to confirm the foster carers will make a suitable placement. The foster carer's profile is then provided to share with the child and their family. The 'duty log book' contained evidence of those carers considered as potential foster carers for referrals made into the fostering team. The section meeting attended by the inspectors verified that availability of foster carers, the children's needs, the complexity of the placement, geography, and level of contact needed all factored into the decision making regarding 'matching'. The 'panel' has a role in 'matching' and agrees a placement choice when choice is available, and is required to agree any placement that takes a foster carer above the "the usual fostering limit"

The Fostering Network preparation course consists of six modules and includes topics such as child protection, safe caring skills and anti-discrimination, the foster carers also complete two sessions run by the fostering recruitment team on their local procedures and health and safety. Further training and development needs are identified during the assessment process and at annual reviews.

The foster carers handbook had been reviewed and updated in line with current practice prior to the inspection. The revised edition was presented to the 'Foster Carers Forum' for comment and therefore the update had not yet been re-distributed to carers. Policies on 'Bullying', 'Allegations' 'Whistle blowing' and 'complaints' are in place. Several of these policies had been devised by 'working groups', which included carers and various professionals. Foster carers are aware that corporal punishments are not permitted and the foster agreement states this explicitly. Carers were able to verbalise their understanding of this when they met with inspectors.

Good practice was demonstrated with regard to the manager collating and evaluating information on any allegations or complaints made. Allegations of abuse or neglect of a child would be primarily the responsibility of the commissioning childcare social workers.

The team manager (family link) confirmed that carers and staff are offered training opportunities. The inspectors also met with the training officer who provided a full appraisal of the staff and foster carers annual training programme.

The inspectors confirmed during visits to foster carers and family link carers that they had been provided with information and training about child protection. Foster carers were aware of the procedure to follow should a child make a disclosure to them whilst in their care.

Inspectors were informed that there is an agreed multi-agency protocol for any child absent or missing from placement.

There is a written recruitment policy and procedure for the local authority. Files reviewed demonstrated good practice.

The personnel department in line with the CRB code of practice maintain Criminal Record Bureau checks (CRB). For audit purposes the CRB records were available for the foster carers and fostering staff members.

The staff within the fostering service are suitably qualified and experienced social workers. There is clear managerial structure with staff line managed and supervised in their work by the fostering team manager.

The inspectors did not attend panel during this inspection visit. The foster panel have written 'Terms of Reference' with regard to their functions and responsibilities. The inspectors met with the chair who confirmed that panel members receive training and an induction. Personnel records with regard to the panel members if not employed by the Local Authority are maintained by the Service Manager. The minutes of the panel meetings held over the last twelve months were examined and were quorate.

The quality assurance role since the last inspection had been further developed with the foster carer review documentation currently being revised.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

7, 13 and 31

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

The educational needs of the children are being given value by foster carers although some felt quite strongly that they required more support from and cohesive working from the children's services departments.

The shared care and short break service for disabled children is working well in supporting parents. There are a range of policies and procedures in place to support this service.

EVIDENCE:

All children using the shared care and short break service had a disability although currently no child is a wheelchair user.

The inspectors met with some of the parents and children receiving this service. Parents were very happy with the measures in place to ensure that individuals, who provided care for their child, had been thoroughly vetted by the family link service. Parents had remained very involved in the care package and had been instrumental in training carers where applicable, to care for their child.

This shared care approach was considered to be fundamental to maintaining stability and consistency for the child.

The inspectors were informed that should a child require a piece of equipment in order to receive a service, then all efforts would be made to provide this for the carers.

Family Link carers are provided with training opportunities. The inspectors noted that all carers are advised by post and in regular newsletters about forthcoming training opportunities. The team manager (family link) had informed carers in December about the forthcoming inspection by the Commission For Social Care Inspection. Mainstream foster carers had also been informed by letter of the forthcoming inspection.

Where children from ethnic minorities are placed all efforts are made to ensure that their individual cultural identity is valued and maintained. During this inspection a weekend recruitment drive was held in Weston Super Mare to attract foster carers from black and ethnic minority groups.

Children are encouraged to participate in a range of initiatives currently happening in North Somerset. Examples were the '0 –17' group and children's champion group. The children and young people consulted presented a concept of a 'multi-disciplinary Dream Team'. This 'Dream Team' would consist of all professionals involved in their care including education and health. This team would be accessible to them in one place at any given time. This concept links well to the Every Child Matters government initiative of providing positive life outcomes. The service also has an Annual Awards ceremony promoting achievements made and there is provision for computers for young people.

Children and young people are also being asked their views using questionnaires.

Inspectors received comments from children and young people in which, it was indicated that their views and ideas are being sought. However, one child felt that his comments and opinions, in particular when preparing for his LAC (Looked After Children) review were not always acknowledged. In light of this the child had requested not be sent any pre review questionnaires.

One foster carer felt very strongly that despite communicating her concerns about the child in her care with both the child's social worker and the fostering support worker she felt that she had not been supported to access educational assessment for a child in her care. The carer stated that reasons given were concerning funding. The carer felt that this had had a detrimental effect on the individual child's educational development. In addition this negative experience had affected her willingness to foster in the future. However, the education department has now highlighted potential dyslexia and provided some classroom support.

One foster carer highlighted during interview that the children's PEP (Personal education Plan) meeting had been planned without their knowledge. This only came to light when the education secretary corresponded concerning this.

Foster carers have access to the Education Department Looked After Children Support Team, which includes Education Welfare Officers, Educational Psychologist and a specialist teacher.

North Somerset Council provides a shared care short break service for disabled children. All foster carers are vetted using the same protocols as mainstream foster carers. There are a range of policies and procedures in place to support this service. The team manager (family link) agreed to undertake the introduction of the foster carer agreement in line with NMS and regulations. The team manager (family link) confirmed that the responsibility for the children's education remains with their parents, and does not directly involve family link foster carers.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

10 and 11

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

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

EVIDENCE:

In interviews with foster carers it was established that all efforts are made to maintain agreed contact arrangements for children and young people. This is not applicable to the children using the family link service.

Efforts are made to place children within or close to their former community in order to maintain school attendance and facilitate contact if applicable. In questionnaires completed by children as part of this inspection process it was concluded that most children felt consulted about important matters in their life such as contact visits. The child's social workers completed feedback questionnaires a few noted that the promotion of contact could be improved.

As a quality indicator in relation to consultation the Quality Assurance team had developed a questionnaire to gain information and feedback from, young people, families and professionals about independently chaired meetings they had attended between August 05 and January 06. For example, family support meetings and LAC reviews. A total of thirteen children returned questionnaires. From the information received 100% felt that they had been given the

opportunity to say what they wanted to and 92% felt that they had been listened to.

The questionnaires sent by the Commission For Social Care Inspection ask children and young people if their foster carer asks their opinion and ideas. Nine were returned and all but two said yes, one said sometimes and one said not very often.

One inspector was told by the children she met that they had been given the option not to speak to her. Two foster carers who met with the inspectors provide training to professionals and other foster carers about listening to children entitled 'Total respect'.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

14 and 29

Foster carers are supported to help children preparing to leave care develop the competence and skills required to achieve independent or semi-independent living. However, carers felt that further development is required.

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

EVIDENCE:

The Fostering Network training course dedicated to the subject of moving on, preparation and independent living is now provided for foster carers.

At the foster carers forum meeting attended by inspectors, a debate took place with regard to improving the support provided to carers and young people during this period.

'Next Step' which is part of North Somerset Children and Young People Services assist with Independent Living skills/issues and work alongside other agencies such as Connexions and Housing.

All foster carers are paid for the service they provide in the form of an allowance. North Somerset in addition introduced a skills based payment scheme. There are three levels to the payment for skills scheme. The current numbers are 17 level 3 carers and two vacancies at this level.

The service is exploring with its finance department if the foster carer 'payment slips' could be changed so that they have more information about their payments.

Foster carer allowances as stated are subject to annual review and the 2005/6 foster carer finance literature was presented for discussion at the foster carers forum. It was noted that carers felt payments regarding providing day care for £3 per hour was out of step and needed urgent review.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

1, 2, 4, 5, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, and 32

The statement of purpose identified the aims of the service. The revised guide for children mainstream services was well presented. The family link service children's guide is yet to be produced.

The all area of the fostering service are managed by a suitably experienced and qualified staff.

Systems are in place to monitor quality. These continue to be developed, and will be assessed more fully at the next inspection of this service.

Staff were being provided with suitable terms and conditions of employment, management support, training and development opportunities.

The training opportunities and range of training topics provided for foster carers was considered to be commendable.

Work continues to improve files and records. The accuracy of information held on children's files must be monitored.

The family link service has adequate premises. The office arrangements team based in the Town Hall with the exception of the arrangements for the manager are satisfactory.

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

EVIDENCE:

The inspectors were impressed with the children's guide, which has been revised and was produced in consultation with children and young people. It contains a summary of the statement of purpose and is colourfully produced in a child and young person friendly format. The new guide had not at the time of the inspection been distributed to each foster carer or the children.

Both the family link service and the main stream fostering service have a statement of purpose compliant with National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

In interviews with parents using the family link service and carers it was established that they had received a copy of the statement of purpose.

A children's guide has not been formally established for this service although this is work in progress. Each individual child and their family are provided with a pen picture '*here we are*' of the carer and their family during any matching process.

The team manager (family link) stated that they have an IT package that will produce information for children in picture/widget formats.

As stated within the section 'Staying Safe' North Somerset Foster Service Manager (Provider Services) has the relevant management qualifications and experience in working with children.

The Fostering Team Manager, who manages the recruitment and supervising support social workers, holds a Diploma in Social Work and Certificate in Management Studies. The team manager (family link) has a social work qualification and will be commencing an Open University management course in February 2006. As stated within the body of this report clear management and deputising arrangements existed. This includes clarity concerning accountability.

Clear roles exist for the monitoring and supervision of the service. These include initiatives such as: individual staff supervision, regular and random case and staff file auditing and weekly section meetings.

During meetings with the Assistant Director Children and Young Peoples Services it was established that performance management strategies were used to promote 'positive life outcomes for Looked After Children'. There is a senior management position dedicated to quality assurance.

'No' was indicated from the eight questionnaires returned to the Commission For Social Care Inspection from foster carers (mainstream services) when asked '*do you think there are enough staff in the fostering service*'.

During staff interviews it was established that there was some concern about increasing caseloads and in the context of the recruitment strategy proving successful.

One recruitment social worker post became vacant during the inspection and the inspectors were informed that this post would now be divided to be half time as recruitment and half time support social worker. Another support social worker had transferred into the adoption team following their recent inspection. Excluding the team manager the staff consists of four full time equivalent supervising social workers for eighty-six foster carers and two full time recruitment social workers, with one current vacancy.

The 'out of hours' support service is provided to foster carer's from the Emergency Duty Team and 'Next Step' team. 'Next Step' provides emergency advice to foster carers and care leavers, which may include visits if necessary. Foster carer feedback suggested that 'Next Step' was valued as a resource. Other support services include; the foster carer 'mentor' scheme, individual funded membership for 'Fostering Network', Fostering Forum' (a consultative group of foster carers appointed by its own membership to meet with the senior managers of the service on a quarterly basis), 'CONSULT' (a multi-disciplinary service designed to support carers and more recently induction packs for new carers).

Carers complete a supervision contract agreed with their social worker and copies are held on file and with the carers. Home visits are planned each

month and should other correspondence occur in the interim, such as phone calls or letters these are dated and written into the foster carer files. On the files reviewed an unannounced visit by the supervising social worker was noted each year. Annual foster carer reviews are designed to appraise the carers and evaluations of the 'payment for skills' is training and competency based.

The service is without a Foster Carers association at present. Staff are encouraging carers to recommence this. According to the Team Manager additional support groups are being planned to provide opportunities for carers to get together.

A 'whistle blowing policy' is in place.

The staff are very experienced qualified social workers the majority of whom have worked for the service for several years. Staff felt that they had access to a range of training opportunities 'in-house'. Training which is outsourced and of benefit to the service and professional development is agreed by the manager, these are usually identified via regular supervision sessions or at appraisal. Staff attend section meetings the minutes of which are circulated via email.

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

Foster care Agreements were seen on all files reviewed. Foster carers were aware of their named supervising social worker; several noted that they had developed good professional relationships with them. Short notice cancellation of appointments, staff holidays and sickness were all noted by foster carers as impacting at times on the service they received.

Foster carers have a 'handbook' containing details of the services policies and procedures. This had been recently updated and revised and was presented to the foster carer forum and has not yet been distributed to carers. Complaints and allegation policies had been revised which was presented at the foster carer forum this again had not yet been widely distributed. The procedure notes that independent support for foster carers should an allegation arise should be offered 'throughout the allegation'.

A spreadsheet record is now in place for any allegations of abuse for the purposes of clearer monitoring and audit. Records are held on the relevant files for staff, carers or children of any complaints or allegations.

Recruitment staff provide four 'Fostering Network' induction training opportunities each year as well as conducting foster carer assessments. The service devised a 'mentor' system whereby an experienced foster carer chats and meets with the 'new' carer within an agreed framework. An induction pack containing relevant information and literature on safe caring, some health and safety from the 'Child accident prevention trust' as well as some health

information is provided. Recent innovations had included looking at providing 'buddies' for children of foster carers. One carer commented however that since becoming approved no robust health and safety checks of the home had been undertaken, 'no one actually checked if the smoke detector actually works'.

The inspectors were provided with a training report regarding the training provided and training details from April 2005 - January 2006. The training plan is designed to meet the needs of the Foster Carers and the children in their care and to meet the requirements of the National Minimum Standards. Training needs analysis relies upon the supervising social workers feeding back relevant 'knowledge gaps' back to the training department to action. The majority of the files reviewed contained the foster carers training record. Ten foster carers have achieved NVQ Level 3 in 'Caring for Children and Young People', with fourteen others currently on the course. Two foster carers are now NVQ assessors with one carer currently training to be an assessor. Level 4 Btec training was under discussion at the time of the inspection. Each carer receives a training newsletter, which updates the training programme and celebrates the progression of the carers through the various courses. They also hold a NVQ support group monthly. Foster Carers and Young people are encouraged and participate in planning, delivering and evaluating training. The 'Total Respect' training is delivered with Looked After Children input. Training which includes both staff and carers is undertaken on various courses. Foster carers commented positively on the training they received. Some courses are 'workshop' based and some experienced carers remarked that they had found these less valuable. On discussion with the Training and Development officer it was clear that some courses are designed as a 'starting' point for discussion and training following on from the workshops cover the topics in more depth.

Training take up increased with the 'Payment for Skills' scheme with positive resultant attendance rates and interest. The training is provided at a training centre with good transport links to enable more people to access training generally. Training times are linked to the foster carers need to care for the children in their care. Evening sessions are planned for the forthcoming year.

A score of 4 has been awarded on this occasion in recognition of the achievements and progress made in regard to foster carer training.

Children's case records are held by the social workers supervising the Child's placement. The responsibility for the file updates lie with the child's social worker. Although there is an organisational policy on case recording access and confidentiality the foster service did not have a specific written policy on what information is kept on the foster carers files or for how long records must be kept. Within the panels Terms of Reference it is made clear that all papers are returned to the panel administrator for destruction.

It was clear when meeting foster carers that information regarding the child and the basis for the placement is explained by the supervising social worker where able. This information relies in part to the detail available from the child's social worker. The intended duration was less defined, if requiring short-term respite; the nature of 'short term' is not explicit.

Some communication issues remain in respect of the child's social worker, the foster carer and the foster support worker. Clear pathways of responsibility must be made regarding documentation and then followed which will assist the foster carers. Staff and managers are working together to take forward initiatives in an attempt to address these ongoing issues. The team manager has meetings and communicates any issues early to ensure concerns are addressed.

Foster carers encouraged children to reflect on and understand their history keeping 'life story' books, photographs and other memorabilia. Foster carers receive training and have policies on record keeping and maintain diaries and logs provided to them from the service to ensure that significant events are recorded. Those carers visited were aware of the need to store information securely.

There are appropriate administration systems in place. Records are stored securely, with computer records password protected. The fostering support service has a part time administrator. The 'new' system in place for over a year now is embedded. Several carers remarked that some documentation regarding the LAC reviews contained 'wrong' dates of birth for the children. It was felt by the carers that it was up to them to correct these anomalies when it should be picked up more readily by the service. The 'system' is described as not perfect but better. When inspectors requested data during the inspection the data did not always cross-reference accurately with the information provided in a differing format and this had to be manually corrected. The team manager randomly audits foster carer case files and discusses the outcome during staff supervision. When social work staff are out of the office administration 'field the calls', the team are currently looking into whether an answer phone would improve the service for the non-emergency calls.

The adoption team had moved offices just prior to the inspection and the recruitment and support social workers had the use of the space vacated. The team is based within two rooms, one housing administration, duty and foster carer supervising social workers and the other the recruitment social workers and recruitment marketing manager. The single office space available to the managers had to be shared with each needing to carry the documentation needed around with them when the other occupies the office. The lack of private space to facilitate supervision and day-to-day management made this less efficient.

The Local authority manages its accounts. Account details forwarded to the inspectors did not include any projections, or that of the use of Independent fostering agencies. They did include details such as staff salaries, advertising appointments and transport expenses. Budgets such as training, equipment and advertising are in place.

A kinship Care policy and guidance is in place since October 2005 but is said to be in draft format. The service has implemented the 'Mumby' judgement in respect of allowance payments to kinship carers. The service is considering if there is a need for a support group specifically to meet the needs of kinship carers. There are eighteen kinship carers. Two of three kinship carers met felt that they did not wish to undertake training following their successful assessments however enjoyed being kept informed of the training offered and felt they could attend should they wish to. Both these carers 'just wanted to get on with looking after their 'family'.

One kinship carer was not clear and despite asking for information in writing had not yet received an understandable definition on the legal status of the child in their care.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion

"N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

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

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	2
9	3
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	3

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

No

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS12	34(3)	Before making a placement a written placement plan/ placement agreement must be made with the foster parent relating to the individual child, which covers the matters specified in schedule 6.	31/03/06
2	FS12	34 & 17 (3)(b) Sch 6	Medical consent must be clarified and in place for all children placed with foster carers.	31/03/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS8	Evidence of the matching process should appear within the individual child and foster carer file. Consideration should be given to developing documentation, which would show the process undertaken from referral to placement as demonstrated within the duty officer system.
2	FS21	In order to reduce some anxieties reported by foster carers to inspectors, clarity should be regularly provided for foster carers about the different remit, roles and

		responsibilities of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A child's social worker. ➤ Fostering support social worker. ➤ Education staff.
3	FS25	Care should be taken to ensure that information such as a child's date of birth is accurately recorded on all documentation relevant to him/her.
4	FS29	A review should take place with a view to increase the payments made to foster carers for day care services.
5	FS26	The current office arrangements for the Manager should be reviewed.

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