



Champions for
Social Care
Improvement

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

24th to 27th February 2004

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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

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

The role of CSCI is to:

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

Inspection Methods & Findings

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

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

YES

Name of Authority

North Somerset Fostering Agency

Address

North Somerset

Local Authority Manager

Sheila Crothers & Jenny Slee (Fostering)
Rosemary Ward (Family Placement)

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01934 888888

Address

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Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply?

NO

Date of last inspection

07/01/03

Date of Inspection Visit		24th February 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Paul Clark	072861
Name of Inspector	2	Sam Chisholm	102696
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Jenny Slee	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

Description of Fostering Service

Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings

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

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(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**
- 11. Family and friend carers**

Part C: Lay Assessor's Summary (where applicable)

Part D: Provider's Response

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 National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) 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 NCSC 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 NCSC in relation to independent fostering agencies regarding registration, the imposition and variation of registration conditions and any enforcement action, and in relation to local authority fostering services regarding notices to the local authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000. The report follows the format of the National Minimum Standards and the numbering shown in the report corresponds to that of the standards.

The report will show the following:

- Inspection methods used
- Key findings and evidence
- Overall ratings in relation to the standards
- Compliance with the Regulations
- Notifications to the Local Authority and Reports to the Secretary of State
- Required actions on the part of the provider
- Recommended good practice
- Summary of the findings
- Report of the Lay Assessor (where relevant)
- Providers response

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

Inspections will be undertaken in line with the agreed regulatory framework with additional visits as required. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report. The report represents the inspector's findings from the evidence found at the specified inspection dates.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

North Somerset Council was established as a unitary authority on 1st April 1996 as part of the Local Government Reorganisation. It includes the towns of Weston Super Mare, Nailsea, Clevedon and Portishead. The Family Placement and Family Link teams are part of the Children's Services Division, Housing and Social Services Department.

The fostering and family link services were the focus of this inspection. They provide foster carers for looked after children and short breaks with foster carers for disabled children. The range of placements are as follows:

Mainstream Carers, who may care for children and young people on a short or long-term basis.

Fostering Plus, who are fee paid carers for young people aged 10 years +. Carers must demonstrate evidence of meeting specific competencies to be approved for this scheme.

Single Placement, who are fee paid carers for young people with specific behaviour or health care needs. Carers may only take one placement and make a commitment for a minimum of six months.

Remand, who are fee paid carers for young people remanded by court or heavily involved in crime. The placement is time limited and task centred.

Respite, who provide short breaks for children to support families or other foster carers.

Family Link, who are approved within the Family Link team to provide regular sessional care for children with disabilities.

Kinship Care, who are relatives or friends of a child or young person, approved to provide care specifically for that child.

Two thirds of carers live in Weston Super Mare, with the majority of the rest living in neighbouring areas of North Somerset.

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

Overall, the majority of standards were met and one was commended. Five requirements and two recommendations were made. The most important one being to provide appropriate accommodation for the Family Link team.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

The statements of purpose were in place.
A minor amendment to the children's guide was required.

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

2 of 2 standards assessed were met

Management of the fostering service (Standards 4-5)

2 of 2 standards assessed were met

Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14)

9 of 9 standards assessed were met.
Recommendations were made for the shortage of black carers to be addressed and for greater clarity of information regarding out of hours support for carers.

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

6 of 9 standards assessed were met.
There were some gaps in staff recruitment records and some staff were still awaiting appropriate job descriptions.
The procedure for monitoring Looked After Children paperwork was commended.

Records (Standards 24-25)

2 of 2 standards assessed were met

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

It was required that the Family Link team be provided with appropriate premises.

Financial Requirements (Standards 27-29)

3 of 3 standards assessed were met

Fostering panels (Standard 30)

1 of 1 standard assessed was met

Short Term Breaks (Standard 31)

1 of 1 standard assessed was met

Family and Friends as Carers (Standard 32)

It was required that Immediate Placement forms be completed before the placement begins.

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

NO

NO

NO

[illegible]

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

YES

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	

Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)**(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

Providers and managers of registered independent fostering agencies must comply with statutory conditions of their registration. The conditions applying to this registration are listed below, with the inspector's assessment of compliance from the evidence at the time of this inspection.

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	Sam Chisholm	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	Paul Clark	Signature	_____
Locality Manager	Michael Miles	Signature	_____
Date	30th June 2004		_____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements and recommendations 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	21	FS20FS16	Ensure that all staff have an appropriate job description.	30 June 2004
2	38	FS32	It was noted that 'Immediate Placement Forms' (NS266) are not being completed at the time of placement by the placing Social Workers and these must be in place before placement begins.	1 April 2004
3	3	FS1	Amend children's guide as detailed in standard 1 of this report.	
4	Schedule 1	FS15	Ensure that all staff recruitment records are complete as detailed in standard 15 of this report.	31 August 2004
5	23	FS26	Ensure that the Family Link team have appropriate premises to operate from as detailed in standard 26 of this report.	31 December 2004

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
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1	FS7	It is recommended that the shortage of Black Foster Carers be addressed by the time of the next Inspection.
2	FS14	There is a lack of clarity about what out of hours support can be expected for younger children from the Next Step team and it is recommended that the agency provide a written information document on this.

* 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	4
Survey of placing authorities	NA
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	24/02/04
Time of Inspection	09:30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	40.0

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

2

The authority now has satisfactory Statements of Purpose for the fostering service and the family link scheme. These include clear aims and objectives for each service. Copies of these were given to the inspector.

Copies of the children's guide were seen and were appropriate for older children. It is recommended that the guide be made available in formats to suit different ages and levels of ability. It also needs to include contact details for the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

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 fostering service has two team managers that job share. Both are qualified social workers experienced in childcare social work and management. Both are intending to start a management course in 2004. The service has a staff of 9.5 full time equivalent social work posts, a half time recently appointed deputy team manager and 2.2 full time equivalent administrative staff.

All social workers are qualified and experienced in childcare social work. The Family Link Scheme has a half time manager responsible for all family support disabled children's services. She is qualified and experienced in childcare social work and is intending to undertake a management course in 2004.

The scheme has three part-time staff who are all qualified and experienced in childcare social work.

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

Telephone enquiries are now made to follow up references.

The inspector saw evidence of CRB checks being renewed and records of checks and references.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The organisational structure is clear and is included in the Statement of Purpose.

Manager and staff interviews indicated that their roles are clearly defined and understood and that there are clear lines of communication between them.

The Services' financial procedures are governed by the Local Authority. There are allocated budgets for the services which are set annually and monitored by the team managers and service manager.

Details of fostering allowances are included in the information pack for prospective carers. Current carers are notified annually of changes to allowances.

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

0

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

0

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

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

Job descriptions for all managers and staff have recently been reviewed by the Local Authority. The team managers are still awaiting the final version of theirs. These will therefore be examined at the next inspection. All of the managers were clear about the levels of delegation and responsibility of their posts.

The newly appointed deputy team manager will deputise for the two team managers of the fostering service.

The family link scheme team manager has a reciprocal deputising arrangement with the manager of the disabled children's team.

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

Policies and procedures for recruitment and assessment of carers are in place. The Manager explained that recruitment campaigns could take place up to three times per year, using local media and libraries for advertising along with the council's Web site. There is attractive promotional material which provides information to prospective Foster Carers.

Assessments are undertaken which include compiling individual profiles on applicants, exploring their experience and competency in parenting skills and considering the suitability of the home. Health and Safety in the home is discussed on the preparation course and the home is inspected as part of the assessment.

Annual reviews inspected showed some evidence of safety checks and noted developments in skills and knowledge by reviewing competencies.

The Foster homes visited as part of the inspection were found to be comfortably furnished and decorated and maintained to a good standard. Each child has his/her own bed. All children interviewed felt happy with the standard of care in their foster home.

The council provides Foster Carers with safety equipment such as stair gates on a 'loan arrangement'. Foster Carers transport is checked at assessment and annual review, ensuring there are adequate seatbelts and child seats. Carers are also required to provide appropriate insurance cover for their vehicle and passengers.

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 Family Placement Team and the Family Link Team have experienced difficulties in recruiting foster carers to meet the needs of all children requiring placements, particularly in relation to ethnicity, religion and language. There has been considerable effort in addressing this shortfall. North Somerset has recently linked with two other local Unitary Authorities in a recruitment campaign, but has had a disappointing response.

The Manager explained that every effort is made to support carers who look after children from different cultural backgrounds, seeking advice from relevant other organisations and individuals. A black Social Worker has recently been appointed to the team and the Inspectors were encouraged by some of the creative recruitment ideas she shared with them. The Family Placement Team have compiled a Resource Manual, which was found to contain information and contact details to assist both social workers and carers in providing

appropriate care for children trans-racially placed. Foster carers that were interviewed were able to describe how they would support a child suffering discrimination. The Fostering Service Training Office provided details of the training programme, for foster carers, social workers and others in the child care department, for the coming year, this included Caring for Black children, Promoting Self Worth and building Self Esteem. It is recommended that the shortage of Black Foster Carers be addressed by the time of the next Inspection.

Children have the opportunity to join groups run by the Family Centre, to provide further support.

A random selection of Placement Agreements and Care Plans for children were inspected. They were found to contain information on talents, interests and hobbies, and identified how these were to be maintained by foster carers with support from the council.

Information gathered from foster carers and children showed that they felt well supported when undertaking hobbies and leisure interests.

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

The Family Placement team make every effort to explore matches for children through current vacancies, by individual discussion and weekly team meetings. They are restricted to the vacancies available at the time with the Council's approved Foster Carers.

The Family Link Service ensures that carers receive appropriate support and are able to access specific services and adaptations.

A random selection of placement agreements were seen. They identified individual children's needs. Details on matching were found on the referral retained by the Family Placement Team. Written comments and conversations with prospective carers were noted, also discussions held between team members at the weekly meeting, about all current requests for placements.

Foster Carers' comments included various experiences of introduction periods. They were able to describe cases when children did have the opportunity to visit prior to placement. They also said that they discussed proposed new placements with young people already in their care.

It is evident from discussions and consultation by questionnaire that all the agency staff and Foster Carers involved undertake the placement and care of children and young people with the best interests of the child as paramount.

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 preparation course for Foster Carers includes specific training in Safe Caring Skills and Child Protection Procedures. The annual training programme is circulated to all foster carers, it was found to contain joint training with Social Work staff on recognising signs of abuse and managing behaviour. Prospective Carers compile a 'Safe Care' policy for their home as an exercise in the preparation training.

The Foster Care Agreement, signed by carers at their approval, contains clear instructions to carers that corporal punishment is not acceptable. There is further written information on punishments contained in the Foster Carers Handbook. Foster Carers who completed questionnaires showed a good understanding of the policy and guidance on punishment.

The Family Link has a system of collating allegations or complaints against carers and details are recorded in the Statement of Purpose. Should such incidents occur it is understood that they would be recorded on individual carers files and presented to Panel at annual review, or before, depending on the outcome of investigation. The complaints log was not inspected.

Training has recently been provided to ensure that all carers are aware of the particular vulnerability of looked after children to bullying. This is an example of good practice.

There is a written procedure for use if a foster child is missing from home; this is included in the Foster Carers Handbook.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:

100

%

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**

Details of contact arrangements for children were found on a random selection of Care Plans and Placement agreements. Children's views on these arrangements had been reviewed as part of the LAC review process.

Foster Carers preparation training includes managing contact, and the importance of supporting children to maintain contact. Foster Carers consulted described facilitating contact, from visits to the foster home to arrange supervised visits with Community Care Workers (they are employees of the authority who undertake support and task centred work with children and families).

Risk assessments are carried out on arrangements for contact, by the child's social worker, and contact does not take place until arrangements are made for any supervision that is needed.

Financial support is provided for carers' expenses to ensure contacts take place at the desired frequency and in the most suitable place.

Foster Carers complete a diary of events, which records the outcomes of contact arrangements. Carers stated that they would feedback to both their support social worker and the child's social worker any difficulties experienced by the child or concerns about contact.

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?

2

Current training for Foster Carers includes 'Communicating with Children'; Carers consulted, demonstrated a commitment to advocating on behalf of children in their care. They were able to give accounts of when they have been able to help children give their opinions and views, particularly at their Care Reviews.

Children's families and others' opinions are sought by way of consultation at LAC reviews in written format and attendance.

There are several opportunities for children to express their views and opinions. This includes consulting with children and their parents as part of the foster carer annual review.

At the time of the Inspection the agency had recruited an Independent Consultant to carry out a review of the service and children placed had been consulted as part of this process.

Children and Young People also have access to the advocacy service 'Pairs' via self-referral or their social worker. This is a service commissioned by the authority from the Children's Society.

The Complaints Procedure for young people is contained in the Children's Guide. However, it is required that this be updated to include the contact details of the Commission.

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**

Foster Carers' assessments include details of the health services in their area and health needs of children that carers feel they are able to meet. The Family Placement Team members have collective knowledge of health services available in the North Somerset area. The Foster Carers preparation course includes two sessions on Health Promotion for children. Carers who have attended, reported how comprehensive and useful this training has proved to be. Foster Carers are also expected to attend First Aid training; this is specifically designed to address the needs of children and babies, however it was not clear to what extent foster carers do or don't undertake this.

There is a Health Record Book for each child looked after. Carers are expected to register children with G.P., Dentist etc, ensure that the child attends their annual medical and record the details in the Record Book.

Details of health care needs and consent for treatment were found on children's Essential Information and Care Plan; the carers are also given these details at placement.

The Authority have the use of the 'Consult'. This is a joint venture between Social Services, Education and Child and Adolescent Health Services; it provides consultation, short-term intervention and specific training for foster carers, in relation to specific children placed.

The Authority have a policy document in place on 'The Health of Looked After Children'.

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**

There is a high priority placed on meeting the child's educational needs. There is a Pupil Referral Unit (a provision for excluded children, run by the education department), which can provide up to 25 hours per week for children. Some carers have found that children will be excluded from the unit if their behaviour is extremely challenging.

The authority can also provide educational support in the form of Home Tutoring (as part of the 'Quality Protects' grant). This also helps with literacy skills.

The Foster Homes visited all provided educational toys and equipment. All children over the age of 11 years have access to a computer, which can be provided by the department.

The service has information systems to demonstrate the educational attainment of children and those who have been excluded. The information was found to be included in the Quality Protects Management Action Plan 2002-2003, a return required of local authority Social Services departments to the DOH/SSI.

The Foster Carers handbook identifies the costs carers are expected to meet in relation to school uniform, trips etc.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

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

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

The Care Leaving Service – Next Step – take over responsibility for the social work support of post-sixteen year old young people Looked After. They work closely with the young people to assess their needs and draw up their Pathway Plans. In addition to direct social work support, there are regular drop-in sessions during evenings and weekends, and there is an out of hours emergency support service. Foster Carers are also able to make contact with a Next Step worker when they require out of hours support. However, several Carers said that there was lack of clarity about what out of hours support could be expected for younger children and it is recommended that the agency provide a written information document on this.

Connexions are closely involved, with a member of staff available throughout the week. There are facilities for preparation of meals, and laundry facilities. There are computers for use by the young people, and facilities for studying. There are regular discussion groups and training sessions, with information available on health, benefits and budgeting, education and training, and leisure. Staff members demonstrated that they work with the young people to enable them to develop the skills needed to live independently, and provide back up support for care leavers. There was evidence that the views of the young people are regularly sought, through discussions and questionnaires, and action taken as appropriate.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There are clear written recruitment procedures, which follow good practice. All people working for the services are interviewed and have references checked as part of the selection process. Telephone enquiries are also made to follow-up references.

Six representative staff files were checked and showed that a record is kept of checks and references that have been obtained.

Some gaps were found in the records and the services need to ensure that every file has a copy of staff qualifications, a photo and the sex of the person. It is also recommended that the person's address, photo and CRB check confirmation are included on the front sheet of each file for ease of reference.

The team manager informed the inspector that CRB checks are in the process of being renewed for all staff and carers. The inspector saw a list that confirmed this.

All social work staff are professionally qualified.

Total number of staff of the agency:

14

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

1

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?

2

Both services are managed by people who have appropriate skills and qualifications.

Team managers have responsibility for allocating and monitoring the caseloads of the staff.

Team managers and the fostering panel ensure that assessment, approval and review of carers is managed and implemented effectively.

Staff have supervision monthly with their team manager. Copies of these were seen. Staff and carers have access to appropriate on-going training. Copies of the annual training plans were seen.

Discussions with staff and managers indicated that they had adequate administrative support, and that administrative procedures for dealing with enquiries from prospective carers and requests for a new service were appropriate.

All job descriptions had recently been reviewed. All staff within the fostering service had received new ones. Copies of these were seen and were specific and appropriate to their roles. Family link staff were still awaiting their revised job descriptions. All staff receive contracts including terms and conditions. Copies of these were seen. Staff have copies of policies concerning grievances, equal opportunities and health and safety.

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

Both services were fully staffed at the time of the inspection. Managers now monitor monthly vacancies, sickness absence and workload levels. This information is passed on to the service manager.

Retention of staff is encouraged through training, supervision and clear workloads. Carers also receive regular supervision, support and training opportunities.

The fostering service has a recruitment policy aimed at recruiting a range of carers. It was identified at the inspection that the service needs to increase its number of black and ethnic minority carers and it is intended that the deputy team manager will take a lead on this.

The fostering service uses the Form F method of carer assessment which is comprehensive. Copies of these were seen on carers' files.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The foster carers handbook contains basic information about health and safety. There is also a health and safety policy for carers, children and staff. There is a whistle-blowing policy known to 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?****3**

The Local Authority provides in-house training and staff said that they are also able to request places on relevant courses provided by other agencies. Overall, staff were satisfied with the induction and training they had received. The training programme is reviewed and updated annually.

All staff receive an annual appraisal to identify training and development needs.

Joint training between staff and carers is held on a regular basis.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

All staff job descriptions had recently been reviewed at the time of inspection. Family Link staff and Team Managers were still awaiting their revised copies. The new job descriptions for family placement staff were seen and were satisfactory. Copies of staff supervision records were seen and were satisfactory. Staff confirmed that supervision sessions are regular and planned in advance.

Staff are able to attend weekly meetings to discuss practice issues and placement requests.

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?****4**

The foster carers handbook contains information in line with Standard 21.2. Foster carers are issued with a copy of this following approval and updated information is forwarded as required. The foster carers' supervision and support policy gives details of training, development and supervision arrangements.

Feedback from carers and staff indicated that there is a good system of communication between the fostering service and the children's social workers. In addition fostering service social workers check whether correct and sufficient Looked After Children paperwork has been given to carers and feedback any omissions to team managers, who pass this on monthly to the service manager. This method of monitoring is commended by the inspectors.

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**

All carers sign a Foster Care Agreement which sets out their terms and conditions of service.

Each carer is supervised by a social worker from the appropriate service. Supervision visits are at least monthly for family placement carers and according to number and frequency of placements for family link carers. Carers from both services are also supported between visits by telephone contact and can have extra visits if needed. Staff interviewed confirmed this. On approval foster carers are given a handbook that includes relevant policies and procedures, guidance, legal and insurance information.

Carers needing assistance out of hours have access to the Avon-wide Emergency Duty Team and a local Next Step Service which also supports care leavers. Some carers said that they would like more clarification of Next Step's role as an out of hours service.

Payments for carers have recently been reviewed and a draft copy of the new Payment for Skills Scheme was seen. This recognises carers with extra skills and training with extra payments. Carers' achievements were also recognised by the Awards Ceremony held for them.

Information about the complaints procedure is widely available and records of these are kept and monitored. Carers are provided with independent counselling in the event of an allegation being made. Allegations and complaints about carers are presented as part of their annual review.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.

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

All foster carers complete the 'Choosing to Foster' course and Family Link carers complete the "When I come to stay" training course. Experienced carers take part in the delivery of the training programme.

Foster Carers also have access to an on-going annual training programme. A copy of the 2004 – 2005 one was seen. This contained courses that contribute to the NVQ's that some carers choose to undertake. Training on equal opportunities, bullying awareness and preparation for independent living was also included.

Training needs and courses completed form part of the carers' annual review.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- All appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers and foster children.

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child or young person in foster care which details the nature and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of her/his life events. Relevant information from the case records is made available to the child and to anyone involved in her/his care.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Files for both children and foster carers were inspected. Children's files were found to be up to date and presented in a format which followed the policy for file content and recording. Children's files contained LAC paperwork, which showed Care Plans, Placement Plans and regular monitoring and review of placement. Life events were also recorded by the allocated Social Worker. Foster carers' files were found to be appropriately laid out.

A member of the Family Placement Team and the child's social worker inform foster carers about children. FPT social workers have access to children's files in the absence of their social worker. Foster carers are also given written information and placement plans. Carers in the Family Link Service have good communication systems in place with social workers.

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 were seen to be kept for staff, carers and children. The system for keeping records for children is congruent with the LAC system.

There are procedures in place for access to files, secure storage and management of confidential information. Security includes lockable cabinets, password protected computers and security systems for the buildings.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:

100

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:

10

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

17

Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £

78.55

Maximum £

302.56

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

The premises used by the family placement team were appropriate for the purpose. There were sufficient numbers of computer terminals and appropriate administrative support for staff.

The premises used by the Family Link team were inadequate for the purpose. The team manager did not have an office and worked at a desk in the corner of a room used by members of another team managed by her. This means that she is unable to make or receive confidential calls and has to ask to use other people's rooms for staff supervision and meetings. In addition the ratio of computer terminals to staff was not equal to that of the Family Placement team. The Local Authority needs to ensure that the Family Link team are properly resourced in terms of premises and IT facilities. The team need a manager who is on site, with an office for the activities mentioned above.

Both services will be provided with a new IT system called SWIFT in March 2004. They hope this will improve data recording and retrieval capabilities.

The council holds adequate insurance for the premises and contents.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Family Placement team fostering services are funded as part of the local authority Social Services department. There is an annual allocated budget, and the Service Plan determines how the budget will be spent. The managers ensure a monthly breakdown of expenditure is available to monitor spending. The Finance Department provide advice in relation to budgeting matters.

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

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Chief Executive, Chief Elected Member and the Director of Social Services determine how the overall budget will be allocated. The budget is held centrally, and delegated to the team managers for management of the individual budgets. The expenditure in the team includes advertising, equipment for foster carers, and training. This is monitored and controlled by the team managers.

The staffing expenditure requires the approval of the service manager.

The Council's accounts are audited and published annually.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

Each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover the full cost of caring for each child or young person placed with him or her. Payments are made promptly and at the agreed time. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually.

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

The Payment for Skills Scheme is currently under consultation and due to be implemented from 01/04/04. A draft copy of this was seen by the inspectors. This information will be available to carers when consultation is completed.

The Family Placement team now manage the process of notifying the finance department about new and ended placements to ensure carers receive correct and prompt payment.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care.

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

Fostering panels have clear written policies and procedures, which are implemented in practice, about the handling of their functions.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The methods used for inspection of the panel included reading the Terms of Reference, interviewing the Panel Chair and attending a panel meeting.

The Terms of Reference are appropriate.

The Panel Chair is the current Service Manager for Commissioning Children's Services. The panel meets every three weeks for fostering services business, and the Council has a separate panel for adoption services.

Current decision-making is collectively by the panel. The authority proposes that from April 2003, the panel will make recommendations to the Assistant Director of Social Services, who will undertake the decision making role.

All panel members have completed Police Criminal Record checks. New members and existing members will undergo CRB checks before starting.

The current composition of the panel includes an elected member and a person identified as Vice Chair.

The Panel Chair described the panel's role in quality assurance, in monitoring the assessment and review of carers, and asking for further information or clarification to ensure thorough and rigorous consideration.

Prospective foster carers are invited to attend panel, they are accompanied by the assessing social worker.

The panel discussion and decision on assessments and reviews are minuted. Relevant records were found on individual carer's files and copies of the minutes of all panel meetings held by the Assistant Director have been made available. These demonstrate concise recording of matters discussed at panel and related decisions.

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

There are two Short-Term Break schemes. One scheme is the Respite scheme, where short-term breaks are provided for families and foster carers to enable them to continue to provide ongoing care to the child or young person. The respite care is either provided by foster carers who are approved for respite placements in addition to being mainstream or Fostering Plus carers, or carers who have been recruited to provide respite care, and are approved by Panel on this basis. Foster carers who receive respite support, to cover holidays and additional respite support, gave positive feedback about the support they receive, and said that the department ensure that the young people go to the same carer for short-term breaks to assist consistency and continuity of care.

As previously stated, the Family Link Scheme was also inspected. The Family Link Scheme provides a Short-Term Break service for children with disabilities. The recruitment and training is undertaken by the Family Link team, and carers undertake the same approval process as all foster carers. The 'Choosing to Foster' course is amended to take into account the range of needs of the children using the service. Parents are more involved in setting up and agreeing placements, and liaise directly with the carers in terms of the care plan for the child. Children are matched to carers who will be able to meet their needs, and to assist this process the Form F (the assessment framework of British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering) is amended to reflect the individual needs of the child.

Family Link carers are approved by the panel, and the annual review is taken to panel. The Inspector observed that the panel members were as thorough in their assessment and review of Family Link carers as with all carers.

The Manager said that all children who receive respite care and family link support have regular LAC reviews. All respite and family link carers are invited to attend foster care training courses, and receive additional training appropriate to the individual needs of the children they care for.

It was noted that there is no distinct 'job description' for social workers in the Family Link Team and it is required that these be put in place.

The office accommodation for the Family Link Team is cramped and lacking in storage cabinets and IT equipment. The Manager has to share an office and this does not promote ease of privacy or ensure confidentiality. There is overcrowding of side streets by employees cars. All of these factors lead the Inspectors to suggest that a review of the appropriateness of the accommodation should take place.

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?

2

Guidance is contained in the operations manual for social workers, to explore a child's kinship and family friends network when considering placement options.

A Family Placement Team social worker undertakes the assessment with prospective carers. Assessments inspected were found to contain the same level of information and background checks as for all foster carers; written references, health and police/CRB checks. Kinship carers are also reviewed annually and the report presented to panel.

It was noted that 'Immediate Placement Forms' (NS266) are not being completed at the time of placement by the placing Social Workers and these must be in place before placement begins.

A staff member explained that the carers were assessed to meet the needs of a specific child, and did not undertake the full competency based assessment. They are approved at the Fostering Panel to provide specific care to named children, and the approval would cease when the child left their care.

Carers are invited to attend post approval training and are allocated a Family Placement social worker.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

NOT APPLICABLE

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____

Date _____

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

We would welcome comments on the content of this Draft report relating to the Inspection conducted on 24th & 27th February 2004 of inspection at North Somerset Fostering Agency and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

Held on file at the Bristol (LO) office

Action taken by the NCSC 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

YES

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 24th June 2004, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

Action plan was required

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

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

NO

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I, _____ of North Somerset Fostering Agency 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, [Name], of North Somerset Fostering Agency am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

--

Print Name _____

Signature _____

Designation _____

Date _____

Note: In instance where there is a profound difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider both views will be reported. Please attach any extra pages, as applicable.