

NORTH SOMERSET KINSHIP LOCAL OFFER



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North Somerset Kinship Local Offer

1. Introduction

North Somerset Council recognises the vital role that kinship carers play in supporting children who cannot live with their birth parents. Kinship care promotes stability, emotional security, and continuity of family and cultural connections. This policy outlines our approach to supporting all types of kinship care and affirms our commitment to a "kinship-first" model, in line with national guidance.

While many children in kinship care thrive, they can often face additional challenges due to the circumstances and experiences which led to them coming into kinship care. Many carers both want and need support to enable them to meet the needs of the children they care for.

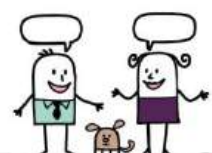
2. Values, Principles and Objectives

As set out in the Children's Social Care National Framework, the following values apply to any work with our children and families:

- Children's welfare is paramount.
- Children's wishes and feelings are sought, heard, and responded to.
- Children's social care works in partnership with whole families.
- Children are raised by their families, with their family networks, or in family environments, wherever possible.
- Local authorities work with other agencies to effectively identify and meet the needs of children, young people, and families.
- Local authorities consider the economic and social circumstances which may impact children, young people and families.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023) also sets out the following 4 principles which North Somerset Council are proud to adhere to:

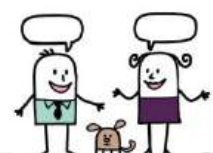
- Effective partnership working with parents and carers happens when practitioners build strong, positive, trusting, and co-operative relationships.



- Verbal and non-verbal communication should be respectful, non-blaming, clear, inclusive, and adapted to parents and carers needs. Practitioners should ensure that all materials provided to children, parents, carers, and families are jargon free, developmentally appropriate and in a format that is easily understood. Where appropriate, material provided to children, parents, carers, and families should be made accessible and translated into their first language. Professional interpreters should be provided, where needed. Practitioners should not need to rely on family members or partners for interpretation services, including British Sign Language.
- Practitioners empower parents and carers to participate in decision-making to help, support and protect children.
- Practitioners involve parents, carers, family networks, and local communities in designing processes that affect them, including those focused on safeguarding children. They value their contributions, expertise and knowledge, reflecting them in service design and continuously seek feedback from parents, carers, family networks, children, and local communities to inform service improvements. Practitioners use feedback from parents and carers to reflect on their own practice.

North Somerset Council also adheres to the overarching principles and objectives set out below, when considering kinship arrangements:

- Whilst recognising that there are requirements which may go with a particular legal status or situation, it is essential that services are not allocated solely on the basis of the child's legal status.
- No child should have to become a looked after child, whether by agreement with those holding parental responsibility or by virtue of a court order, for the sole purpose of enabling financial, practical or other support to be provided to the child's carer.
- In undertaking any assessments, North Somerset Council seek to establish trusting and supportive relationships with potential or existing kinship carers and are mindful of the emotional impact of assessments.
- Effective engagement with family networks will consider how resources within the family's wider networks have been sourced for the benefit of the child. North Somerset Council will empower family networks to come to a decision on how this can be done. Where it is being explored whether a member of the family network could care for the child on a short- or longer-term basis, their capacity and willingness will be considered.
- In North Somerset we promote permanence for children. This is the framework of emotional, physical and legal conditions that gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity. By supporting children who cannot live with their parents to remain with members of their extended family or friends we recognise that permanence is more likely to be achieved. Permanence for these



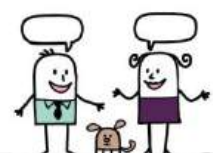
children is about providing a better alternative to growing up in the care of the local authority. For most looked after children, permanence is achieved through a successful return to their birth family, where it has been possible to address the factors which led to the child becoming looked after. Where this is not possible, kinship care will often provide an important alternative route to permanence for the child, particularly where this can be supported by a child arrangements order, or a special guardianship order.

3. Types of Kinship Care

Informal Kinship Care: Informal arrangements are when a close family member or friend look after a child for a temporary or permanent amount of time. This arrangement is agreed privately with the parents and parental responsibility for the child remains with the parents. There is no approval process as this is an arrangement agreed between the family and is led by the person with parental responsibility. The duration of this type of arrangement is subject to the discretion of the person with parental responsibility. Most such arrangements remain entirely private without the need for the involvement of children's social care services, although where a child is assessed as being in need, support may be provided under section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

Private Fostering: This arrangement is when individuals or families who look after a child under the age of 16 (or 18 if the child has disabilities) for more than 28 days, but who are not close relatives of the child. Private foster carers have a significant responsibility for the child's welfare during their time in their care. While they don't have parental responsibility in the same way that birth parents do, they do have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. This includes providing the child with a safe and nurturing environment, ensuring their physical and emotional needs are met, and promoting their education and development. Private foster carers are required by law to notify their local authority of any private fostering arrangement, allowing the authority to assess the suitability of the arrangement and provide support and oversight. The arrangement is assessed by local authority, but the carer is not 'approved' as a local authority foster carer as in a formal kinship care arrangement. The arrangement may be prohibited if assessed by the local authority as unsuitable. The duration of the arrangement is subject to the discretion of the person with parental responsibility and the agreement of the private foster carer. It is not a formal placement, but there are statutory visits to the child by a social worker (minimum 6 weekly in first year, then 12 weekly).

Kinship Carers with a Child Arrangement Order: Child Arrangements Orders are granted by the family court and determine who a child can live with and/or who a child can stay with and for how long and can also determine the frequency of family time. The kinship carer shares parental responsibility with the child's parents, or others with parental



responsibility, until the age of 18, unless the court states otherwise. This arrangement is usually appointed by the court following application. There are usually no formal supervision arrangements in this type of situation. If the child was previously looked after they will be eligible to apply to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund, if specific support is needed.

Kinship Foster Carers (Formal): Kinship foster care provided under local authority arrangements where a care order exists, or where a child is subject to section 20 of the Children Act and is formally a Looked After Child. These carers are approved as local authority foster carers in accordance with Fostering Services Regulations. This arrangement can potentially last until the child reaches adulthood, or beyond. It is expected that the local authority ensure that this arrangement remains suitable and will supervise this in line with Fostering Regulations. All kinship carers in North Somerset have access to the same support as our mainstream foster carers, this includes financial support.

Special Guardianship Carers: They have parental responsibility for a child following an order made by the family court. Special guardianship carers live permanently with their children and can make most of the day-to-day important decisions. There are some exceptions to this and would need permission from the court to make decisions such as changing the child's surname or removing them from the country to reside abroad for longer than 3 months. In North Somerset we offer support to our special guardianship carers, if they require it. Financial support is provided in line with age related allowances that mirror those paid to kinship foster carers.

4. The Assessment Process

For formal kinship care arrangements and special guardianship assessments, it is necessary for North Somerset Fostering Service to assess the family member/friend's suitability to care for the child. This typically comprises of visits to the home, in-depth discussions regarding their lifestyle, parenting capacity and previous history. An assessing social worker will be allocated to undertake the assessment; they will build a relationship with the applicants in order to carry out lengthy discussions, which at times may be emotional. We recognise that the assessment process can be a difficult time for the whole family as there is a greater complexity in the relationship between foster carers and parents when the carers are family members or friends. Whilst kinship foster carers are providing a stable home and care to a child, this is sometimes at the cost of the loss of their relationship with the child's parents, who may be the carers' own child, sibling or friend.

Sometimes kinship carers are providing care in response to an emergency, without a significant opportunity to consider the options and to plan ahead for the impact it will have



upon them and their family. Many carers have to make life-changing decisions, such as giving up jobs or moving home, in order to respond to the needs of the child. We recognise that this can be a very difficult and upsetting time for such carers. Every assessment is undertaken with sensitivity and respect.

In addition to the completion of an assessment, North Somerset Council will need to carry out numerous checks on the carers and any other adults or children residing in their home. For example, a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check will be completed on any adult in the home and also any adult that may have care of the child on an ad-hoc basis. A health assessment will also be required as this will determine whether the carer is well enough to care for the child and whether we need to provide some additional support.

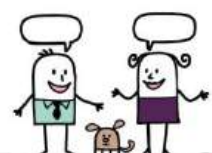
During the assessment process there may be concerns regarding the kinship carers accommodation and how this will accommodate an additional child. In North Somerset we will provide support by liaising with our housing providers to try and obtain more suitable accommodation, if necessary. We would never let unsuitable housing be the only reason that a kinship arrangement could not be made and would always endeavour to offer support with this.

We are aware that some of our kinship carers are employed, we will always try and fit the assessment process in around this. Sometimes kinship carers have to have time off work to care for children in emergency circumstances, if this is the case we will support the carer by offering short term financial support, if deemed appropriate.

Once the assessment is complete, the carer will receive a copy of this and will have time to provide their own comments. If there are any discrepancies these can be highlighted and discussed with the assessing social worker.

For a kinship carer to be 'approved' they would be required to attend fostering panel with their assessor. The fostering panel is made up of a number of people from a variety of professional backgrounds including foster carers and social workers. Anyone attending fostering panel receives additional information about what to expect prior to attendance. All recommendations from fostering panel are presented to North Somerset Council's Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for a final decision. Once this decision has been made the ADM will write to the carers with the outcome.

Special Guardianship assessments will be presented to the courts, the judge will make a decision on whether to grant a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) to the carers. Once this happens the child will no longer be looked after by the local authority and their carers will be able to exercise their parental responsibility. The carers can still access support as special guardians and they will be provided with contact details for this service.



5. Skills to Care Training

North Somerset Fostering Service recognises that formal kinship care arrangements differ to those of mainstream fostering. For example, a mainstream carer will have approached the local authority with a desire to become a foster carer, they usually have some awareness of the process and timeline and will have factored this into their lifestyle prior to applying. We know that this is not the case with our kinship carers, some of them will have responded to emergency situations and as such they will now need to adhere to requirements.

As we are aware of the impact upon kinship carers emotions, we have created bespoke training which is specifically for carers in kinship arrangements. This training is similar to Skills to Foster training which is usually delivered at the initial stages, following an application to foster, by a potential mainstream carer.

The Skills to Care training is designed to provide the same information regarding becoming a foster carer as the mainstream carer would receive but it is created in a way which recognises the additional challenges that our kinship carers face. This training is delivered at a highly emotional time for kinship carers but is delivered with sensitivity and awareness of their current circumstances.

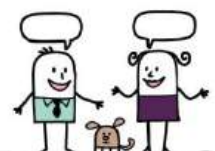
Included in this training is information regarding the expectations of formal kinship carers, the differences between being a formal kinship carer and becoming a special guardian and information regarding family time. We aim to prepare kinship carers for the challenges that they will face. Attending this training can do this and can also provide an opportunity for them to meet other people in similar situations. We have been told that this makes kinship carers feel better about their personal circumstances.

All of the social workers in our service have experience of working with kinship carers. They have compassion and understanding of the carers that they are working with and recognise how challenging the role of kinship carer can be.

6. Financial Support

North Somerset will fund an initial legal consultation for a kinship carer. This will be for them to gain advice on the best type of kinship care for them. This is usually funded when a formal kinship carer is considering a special guardianship arrangement with a view to providing permanence to the child they are caring for.

All of our formal kinship carers are paid a fostering allowance which is the same as that paid to our mainstream foster carers. This allowance is paid on a fortnightly basis and is



paid from the date the placement became a formal arrangement. The initial fostering allowance comprises of an age-related allowance according to the child's age and also a skills payment based on the skills and relevant experience of the carer.

Age of Child	0-4 years old	5-10 years old	11-15 years old	16-18 years old
Weekly Allowance	£194.60	£213.50	£236.25	£269.50

Skills Level	Weekly Payment
Foundation	£78.83
Intermediate	£133.57
Advanced	£186.19

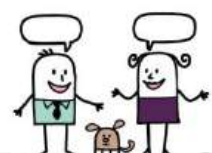
All of our kinship carers are paid at the foundation level; this is payable to them until they have completed the relevant criteria to move up to intermediate level. Our kinship carers are asked to complete their Training, Support and Development Standards, in line with fostering regulations, within the first 18 months of being kinship carers. Completing these is essential to progressing to intermediate level.

In addition to the weekly payments above, North Somerset Council will ensure that payments for equipment for the fostering home are provided, if needed, for example beds and furniture for the child's bedroom.

If a child is placed with a kinship carer, without adequate clothing, we will provide a clothing allowance to the carer, this is usually up to £150 but is based on individual circumstances and the child's needs.

Additionally, we ensure that kinship carers receive an allowance for the child's birthday, this will support them to purchase presents or provide an appropriate celebration. A holiday allowance is also provided as we recognise that taking an additional child on a family holiday or on day trips away can be expensive. We also provide an annual payment for the carer to support the child to celebrate a festivity.

Age	Birthday Payment	Festival Payment	Holiday Payment
0-4 years old	£194.60	£194.60	£389.20
5-10 years old	£213.50	£213.50	£427
11-15 years old	£236.25	£236.25	£472.50
16-18 years old	£269.50	£269.50	£539



The cost of birth certificates and passports for children in formal kinship arrangements will be met by the local authority.

Mileage is paid to our formal kinship carers for any trips to the hospital, transport to family time or other exceptional travel expenses which have been agreed.

Council tax will be paid for our formal kinship carers once they have received their approval following fostering panel. North Somerset recognise that some of our kinship carers do not reside locally, however, we are committed to ensuring that council tax is paid regardless of where the kinship carer resides.

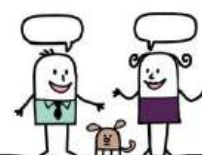
Sometimes when our kinship carers are struggling to manage difficult situations, we will provide short breaks or day care for the children that they care for. We want our kinship arrangements to continue if this is in the best interests of the child so we will do our best to ensure this happens by providing as much support as possible. In addition, if a child accesses a short break for less than 3 nights we will not deduct any payment from the kinship carer as we recognise that this can sometimes create a reluctance to receive the support and may further risk the placement breaking down.

As part of our financial offer we will provide free access for 2 adults within the kinship fostering household to [North Somerset Council Leisure centres](#), and currently we also provide free swimming lessons for all children in foster carer and kinship arrangements (including special guardianship arrangements).

Once approved, following fostering panel, our kinship carers are also automatically provided with free membership of the [Fostering Network](#), the leading national fostering charity, giving them a range of benefits. In addition, they can apply for a Blue Light Card which will provide discounts to a range of shops and experiences. There is also a Carers Card which can be obtained from Carers Card UK, this also provides a range of discounts and benefits.

We have an expectation that a kinship carer saves money for the child until they reach adulthood. Carers are expected to save the amounts below and provide details of the child's account, when asked.

Age of child	Savings (per week)	Pocket Money (per week)
0-4 years	£6	0
5-10 years	£8	£5
11-15 years	£9	£7
16 – 18 years	£10	£10



For our special guardianship arrangements, we will provide a non-means tested financial allowance. This is based upon the current age -related fostering allowance (as detailed above) and will increase with age as the child grows. This is payable until the child is 18 years old. If the special guardian was previously a formal kinship carer they will receive the appropriate skills payment for at least 2 years following the special guardianship order being granted.

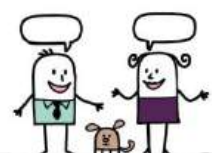
7. Support and Training

Once a kinship carer enters into a formal arrangement with North Somerset Council (when the child they are caring for is a looked after child) they will be provided with their own social worker who will be referred to as a supervising social worker. The role of the supervising social worker is to provide support, guidance and a formal supervision arrangement to the kinship carer. The supervising social worker will be expected to visit at least every 2 to 4 weeks at the initial stages of the placement. Once they feel the carers have adjusted to their new role and there are no safeguarding issues to consider, this can be reduced to between 6 and 12 weekly. This will be set in conjunction with the kinship carer, the supervising social worker and the team manager. Supervising social workers will communicate with carers in between visits, if necessary.

If for any reason a carer could not contact their supervising social worker (for example if they are on annual leave) we have a duty system where carers can contact us for help, advice and support. Contact details for this will be provided to all of our carers. This includes special guardianship carers who may not have an allocated supervising social worker.

In North Somerset we are proud to be part of the Mockingbird project which is an innovative project set up by the Fostering Network. This enables carers to work together as a constellation (hub), supporting each other and building positive relationships. Our kinship carers have the opportunity to be part of the Mockingbird hubs. We currently have 4 hubs in North Somerset and have received positive feedback from the kinship carers who are part of these hubs.

North Somerset offer a range of support groups in the form of coffee mornings to all of our carers; this is inclusive of our kinship carers. At each of our coffee mornings we try and offer a different guest speaker to provide information regarding a variety of topics. For example, during pride month we had a coffee morning to celebrate pride, the guest speaker was the lead for the LGBTQ forum. He provided extensive information regarding how we could seek support for children in this area who may require it. We have 6 coffee mornings planned throughout the year. In addition, we encourage our kinship carers to



attend the coffee mornings in Weston Super Mare which are specifically for kinship carers, including special guardians – these are organised by Kinship.org who are an organisation supporting kinship carers. Kinship.org provide training and advice for kinship carers and we encourage our carers to access this support.

We have an extensive list of training that can be accessed by our kinship carers. A list of upcoming training is provided on a weekly basis and is sent out to carers on a Friday. We also include training provided by kinship.org as a way of reminding our kinship carers.

All of our kinship carers are provided with a Skills Development Plan which will identify areas that carers may need to develop further and how we can support them to do this.

Below are some of the training sessions that we provide to our carers. We can source specific training if we feel it necessary to support individual situations.

- Paediatric First Aid
- Child Protection
- Children and Gaming
- Domestic Abuse Awareness
- PREVENT
- ADHD and Masking
- Autism
- Trauma Awareness
- Teenager Sexual Health
- Supporting Refugee and Asylum-seeking Children
- The Cumulative Impact of Neglect on Children
- Managing Allegations
- Drugs Awareness Training
- LGBT+ Inclusivity Training

For those kinship carers who may struggle with accessing or completing training we are creative in trying to support their needs. We have a training co-ordinator who has been out to carers homes and provided one to one support to complete training, ensuring that they have the understanding of the content and that this is relevant to their role.

As noted earlier, there is an expectation that kinship carers complete their Training, Support and Development Standards within 18 months of being approved. We recognise that some carers may struggle with this and would value the support of their supervising social worker, the training co-ordinator or other more experienced foster carers to do this.



There is a range of support available for children and carers in North Somerset, this includes early help, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), health and wellbeing for the under 5's and advanced parenting groups. More information regarding this support can be found here [Children, young people and families | North Somerset Council](#)

8. Consultation

We always try to include our carers when making any changes to the service or updating our policies. Kinship carers are included in this and invited to meetings to provide their feedback.

A survey was conducted to ascertain our kinship carers' views of North Somerset. This is something that we are going to conduct regularly to encourage carers to feedback to us regarding the service and how we can improve. There was a mixed response from this:

- *75% of kinship carers said that North Somerset was good/very supportive of kinship carers, 25% felt it was poor.*
- *25% of kinship carers felt that there were no improvements needed for the kinship service, 75% said that there were areas we could improve and gave examples of having more understanding of their role.*
- *With regards to training 50% of kinship carers said that this was relevant and accessible, 50% felt that the training hub we use needed to improve.*
- *75% of kinship carers felt satisfied with their payments, 25% felt there could be more help.*
- *We asked how the children in their care were doing, 100% of kinship carers said they were doing well.*

In response to the survey, we have now created a bespoke skills to care training course (see section 5). We are also currently reviewing our training hub and whether the content here is working for our carers. We are collating additional options and will ascertain which one is best suited to our carers, including our kinship carers.

One of our kinship carers is a grandmother caring for her 2 grandchildren, this is her story of the journey of her kinship carer role, she is happy for her photograph to be shown and is proud of her role and how well the children in her care are doing:





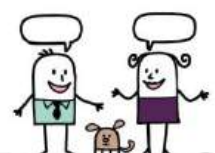
“I was never approached by the local authority due to the circumstances of the children arriving with me. They were brought to me by the police, which was terrifying and shocking for the children and me. The assessment process was stressful, at times, I questioned myself if I could give the children the support they needed. At times it felt intrusive, but once the assessment was completed, I felt elated that I was trusted to be the children’s voice, to keep them safe, loved, and help them in the future.

My training experience has and continues to be very rewarding. It helps me understand child trauma, but also strategies for dealing with my own worries as a carer. I have had such amazing support during my time. This ranges from the supervising social workers, the children’s social workers, schools & health teams, alongside kinship support groups. At times, I felt so lonely and terrified but I feel safe and reassured by the professional teams surrounding me and the children. I could not do this without them!

Being a kinship carer for children who have experienced trauma is a journey filled with emotional depth and profound challenges. It demands patience, resilience, and an unwavering commitment. To create a safe space where the children feel understood, rebuilding their trust in relationships, and guiding them gently towards emotional recovery. It is challenging and I miss 'me', giving up my life to support the children through the trauma they have experienced, I have good and bad days but to see the little bits of recovery in the children is so rewarding and I wouldn't have been able to get through without the professional team that surrounds us every day!”

Helpful Information

North Somerset Fostering Website



We have a section on our fostering website which is dedicated to kinship care, this can be accessed here [Kinship Care – Fostering North Somerset](#) there is an opportunity to complete a form to ask a question.

Complaints

If anyone wishes to make a complaint regarding the service they have received from North Somerset they can do this here [Complaints about social services | North Somerset Council](#)

Coram Children’s Legal Centre (CCLC)

Coram Children’s Legal Centre provides free independent legal advice and factsheets to children, parents, carers and professionals.

Website: Home new - childlawadvice.org.uk Telephone number: 0300 330 5480.

Family Lives and Gingerbread

Family Lives, in consortium with Gingerbread, offer free online and phone support for parents and carers on various topics, such as mental health, behaviour, bullying, divorce, finances, welfare rights and more.

Website: [Parenting and Family Support | Family Lives](#). Telephone number: 0808 800 2222.

Website: [Home | Gingerbread](#). Telephone number: 0808 802 0925.

Family Rights Group (FRG)

Family Rights Group provides specialist advice to parents, kinship carers, relatives and friends who are involved with children’s services in England or need their help. Family Rights Group’s advice service is free, independent and confidential. It supports families to understand the law and child welfare processes when social workers or courts are making decisions about their children. The service offers a website packed with useful advice resources, online forums, a free telephone advice line, a webchat service, and online enquiry form.

Website: [Get Help and Advice - Family Rights Group](#). Telephone number: 0808 801 0366 (open Monday to Friday 9.30am to 3pm)

Kinship

Kinship is a national charity for kinship care in England and Wales. It supports grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and family friends who care for children when their



parents cannot. The charity provides information, advice, training, and support, including peer support groups and training services.

Website: [Kinship: Home | The Kinship care charity | England and Wales](#). Telephone Number: 0300 123 7015. The phone line is open Monday – Friday, 9:30am – 2pm. Kinship carers can also use the Kinship Compass to find out about local information and support: [In your area - Kinship](#)

Kinship lead on the government departmental contract for peer to peer support groups across England. You may wish to find a local group online [Kinship Peer Support Service | Funded by the DfE](#)

Professionals working with kinship carers can access information about Kinship here: [For professionals - Kinship](#)

