

North Somerset Fostering Service

Statement of Purpose



1. Introduction

It is a requirement of the Fostering Services England Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services that each fostering agency produces a Statement of Purpose, including its aims and objectives, a description of the service it provides and the facilities that are provided. This Statement of Purpose gives an outline of those requirements, how the service is managed and its fitness to provide fostering services. It shows the policy and performance framework that underpins our work and shows how the welfare of children will be met and good outcomes achieved for all children in its care. It also demonstrates the systems which we have set in place to recruit, train, supervise and support foster carers.

This statement is available to all members of staff, foster carers, children and birth parents and is publicly available on our fostering website. The Statement of Purpose is updated and amended annually.

2. National Legislative and Policy framework.

North Somerset Fostering Service is managed in accordance with the principles outlined in the following:

- Children Act 1989
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2013 (Amendments to the Children Act 1989)
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011)
- Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010
- Care Planning and Fostering Regulations (Amendments) 2015
- The Disability and Equality Act 2010
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Children (Leaving care) Act 2000
- Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD) for Foster Carers
- Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations 2004: Fostering Services July 2013

3. Policy Statement

North Somerset Fostering Service believes that every child 'Looked After' (subject to a care order or accommodated with parents' consent under section 20 of the Children Act) should be able to enjoy the same quality of life and opportunities as all children. We want all the children of North Somerset to be happy, healthy, safe and residing in a nurturing environment. We will make sure that every child and young person has the opportunity to achieve their potential because every child matters to us. We will work to narrow the gap so that every child has the chance to succeed regardless of their background and the barriers they face. We want to make sure that every young person has the highest hopes for their future and the support to fulfil them.

North Somerset Fostering Service recognises that a child's needs are best met by a nurturing family, and we are committed to placing children who are not able to remain in their own family in an appropriate alternative family home wherever possible. The first priority will be for children to be placed with their extended family or friends (known as kinship carers) and supported under regulation 24 of the Care Planning Regulations where this home is deemed suitable and the child is 'Looked after'. A separate document outlining our Local Offer to our kinship carers is available, this considers more widely our commitment to kinship arrangements.

North Somerset Fostering Service is committed to placing children with our approved foster carers and has developed a dedicated service that actively works to meet the quality standards required and the diverse needs of the children who become looked after by North Somerset and their families.

We are also committed to placing children with foster carers in the local area in order for them to maintain family time arrangements with families and friends, to continue attending the same school and thrive within their community wherever possible. Children's safety and welfare are actively promoted in all foster homes together with protection from abuse and other forms of significant harm.

Relationship building is very much at the forefront of our Fostering Service and we encourage all of our carers to be part of our Mockingbird hubs as we recognise that this provides additional support to carers and children within the constellations.

4. Aims

The main aim of North Somerset Fostering Service is to provide safe, high quality foster homes for children, with carers that value, support and encourage them to grow and develop as individuals. As well as promoting their health and general well-being, the service is committed to:

- ensuring that foster carers are encouraged to help children and young people to reach their maximum educational ability.

- ensuring foster carers provide good parenting for all children who are looked after and that children will be consulted and encouraged to actively participate in their care and family life.
- ensuring that the service offered is based on statutory requirements, sound principles and good practice.
- multi- agency working and developing partnerships and protocols with organisations which can progress the needs of our 'Looked After' children.
- working at all levels in partnership with Education and Health to promote the well - being of all North Somerset's children in care.
- respecting the rights and responsibilities of 'Looked After' children and their carers and involve them in all aspects of service delivery.

The Fostering Service also aims to provide a high-quality responsive child-centred service in relation to its core functions and to recruit new foster carers from within our community and from the kinship networks of 'Looked After' children wherever this best meets their needs. We prepare applicants through training to be able to deal with the range of issues that carers face when looking after children.

The service assesses each applicant comprehensively to ensure that they are suitable and able to carry out their role and to supervise and support carers so they can promote and achieve the highest standards of welfare, safeguarding and outcomes for our children.

5. Objectives

- To ensure that there is a choice of high-quality foster homes available to meet the complex and diverse needs of individual children. Each foster carer will have a qualified social worker (supervising social worker) for supervision and support and to assist with identifying and reviewing carer training and development needs as part of a Skills Development Plan.
- To promote a safe, stable and enabling environment ensuring that children are listened to and protected from abuse and neglect. Along with promoting each child's physical, social, emotional and intellectual development by providing them with the opportunity of developing their full potential. This will happen through health care, education and leisure activities that will enhance their life chances.
- To have a positive regard for the child or young person's racial, religious and cultural needs. All children should have equal access to local family-based care. The individual child's needs, wishes and feelings are paramount and are taken into consideration in relation to their foster home. Siblings will be accommodated together wherever possible and appropriate.

- Promoting family time for the child and their family throughout their time in foster care will be encouraged and facilitated where this is appropriate. We will also ensure foster carers make children aware of their rights and the complaints, compliments and advocacy process by providing the relevant information.
- To ensure that approved foster carers are clear about their role and that they are supported in their tasks, duties and responsibilities by having adequate support mechanisms in place as outlined in their foster carer agreement.
- The payment for carers skills model ensures quality by providing a competency and skills framework with clear expectations for foster carers, together with a training and skills development programme. We ensure that all practice promotes equal opportunities for all and value diversity of both fostered children and carers regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, age, religious beliefs, disability or marital status.
- To ensure that any decisions are transparent and fair and that any concerns are addressed, and information about the complaint's procedure is made available to all. We have an Independent Fostering Reviewing Officer who will ensure that service performance is monitored, assessed with outcomes measured via a quality assurance framework when annual reviews are undertaken.
- To promote team and personal development and training for both staff and foster carers, this includes panel members. We also regularly learn from those that are in receipt of services through our fostering panel feedback and ADM feedback. We always consult with children who are fostered, using a variety of methods to ensure their voice is heard.
- A commitment to continuous improvement through the provision of wider fostering choices for children by pioneering more innovative approaches to foster care that are needs led, delivering flexible packages of support to children in care.
- To support young people to 'stay put' with their foster families beyond their eighteenth birthday where this is in this the best interests of the young person and with the full agreement of the foster carers.

6. Confidentiality and Conflicts of interest

Foster carers are provided with full information about the children placed with them and are expected to observe high standards of confidentiality. As an agency we maintain records on carers and children. Staff and foster carers are expected to declare any potential conflicts of interest.

7. Principles and Standards of Care

North Somerset Fostering Service is committed to achieving and maintaining the highest standards and offering quality provision. It has been developed and is managed in accordance with the Fostering Service (England) Regulations

2011 and the principles outlined in the National Minimum Standards 2011. These standards apply equally to our kinship carers.

- the welfare of the child is paramount.
- children who are looked after are consulted regarding their wishes and feelings in regard to all aspects of their care.
- every child who is in care will have a safe care plan, and a personal education plan
- every child in care will be encouraged to participate appropriately in religious and cultural beliefs in accordance with their wishes and feelings and developmental understanding
- every child in care will be cared for in an environment free from oppression, discrimination and prejudice, encouraging them to develop a positive sense of their own identity
- the fostering service will support the identified aims and objectives of the child's care plan and work alongside other professionals in the implementation of this
- the Fostering Service will work in partnership with other professionals to promote family time between children and their family members and other significant persons.

8. Services Provided

The Fostering Service approves foster carers to look after children aged 0-18 years. Many of the children placed have experienced trauma including abuse or neglect before being fostered. Some children present with challenging behaviour, special needs or complex health conditions. It does this by assessing, registering, supervising, supporting and training a wide range of carers.

North Somerset operates a fostering scheme whereby carers are paid at a foundation level, intermediate or advanced level. In addition, all Foster Carers are financially supported via weekly age-related allowance payment (ARA). In some situations, carers are paid a specialist payment, this is in relation to the child that they are caring for. For example, children who have a disability or are stepping down from residential care and require a more specialist type of care.

It also sets out practice requirements, training and development expectations and support group attendance requirements at each level. Each level adds more to the previous level, so that advanced level carers have a high level of skills and competencies, alongside this they are required to undertake a variety of actions to maintain this level. In return they are paid the advanced fee. Carers are able to progress up through the skills levels when they have evidenced the required

competencies and skills to achieve this. Once achieved there is a set criterion in order to maintain this.

North Somerset Recruitment

The Fostering Service is responsible for initial enquiries, recruitment, preparation training and the assessment of all prospective carers to the point of approval by the Fostering Panel and Agency Decision Maker. There is information and advice about fostering for North Somerset on the fostering website.

Support and Supervision to Foster Carers

North Somerset provides support and supervision to carers who offer short, medium and long term care to children in accordance with their fostering approval.

Short term foster carers care for a child or a young person for a limited period of time while arrangements are made for the child to return to their family or to an alternative fostering family or care provision.

Long term carers provide a permanent home for a child who has been matched with them. Permanent foster care is a good outcome for some children where adoption is not appropriate, such as those who may be older and who have close links with their own family.

Foster Carers are also supported to offer a staying put arrangement for young people who turn 18 years old until they are 21 years old or up to 25 years if the young person is still in education.

Mockingbird Family Model Foster Carers

The Fostering Network's Mockingbird programme is a way of delivering foster care using an extended family model; North Somerset recruits, approves and supports Mockingbird carers who are linked with the child's primary foster carer to provide short breaks for the child, peer support, regular joint planning and training and social activities. These arrangements support and strengthen foster care for carers and children.

Short Breaks/Sleepover Care

These carers provide care for children who need support at different times such as some weekends or during the school holidays. They can offer children a short break stay for time limited periods in accordance with their needs and support plan.

Specialist Fostering

The fostering team also supports carers who provide a home and care to children with additional and complex needs.

Emergency Duty Fostering

Any North Somerset carers who are in a position to offer time limited emergency fostering provision via 'on call' arrangements can offer this care (within their approval range) and if they are able to manage unplanned

arrangements where there may be little information available. These arrangements can be made outside of usual office hours. Foster Carers are paid £50 per night to be on Emergency Duty Fostering.

Kinship Carers (connected persons foster carers)

North Somerset is committed to placing children with family or friends with whom a child is already familiar with rather than with carers who the child does not know, wherever possible. The child's Social Worker usually identifies these carers by finding out about the child's support network.

Family and friends carers are known as Kinship Carers. There is provision for children to live with a relative or friend for up to sixteen weeks without the prior approval of the Fostering Panel. Temporary approval is agreed via a Regulation 24 assessment undertaken by the child's Social Worker. This arrangement is approved by the ADM for fostering. These arrangements must be assessed and presented to Fostering Panel within 16 weeks, unless an extension is granted under regulation 25, for up to a further 8 weeks.

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

The LADO role is outlined in Working Together 2015 and is in place to ensure that allegations against people working with children are progressed in a timely and appropriate way. The LADO should be made aware of all cases in which it is alleged a person who works with a child has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child or may have harmed a child;
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against a child; or
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates s/he is unsuitable to work with children.

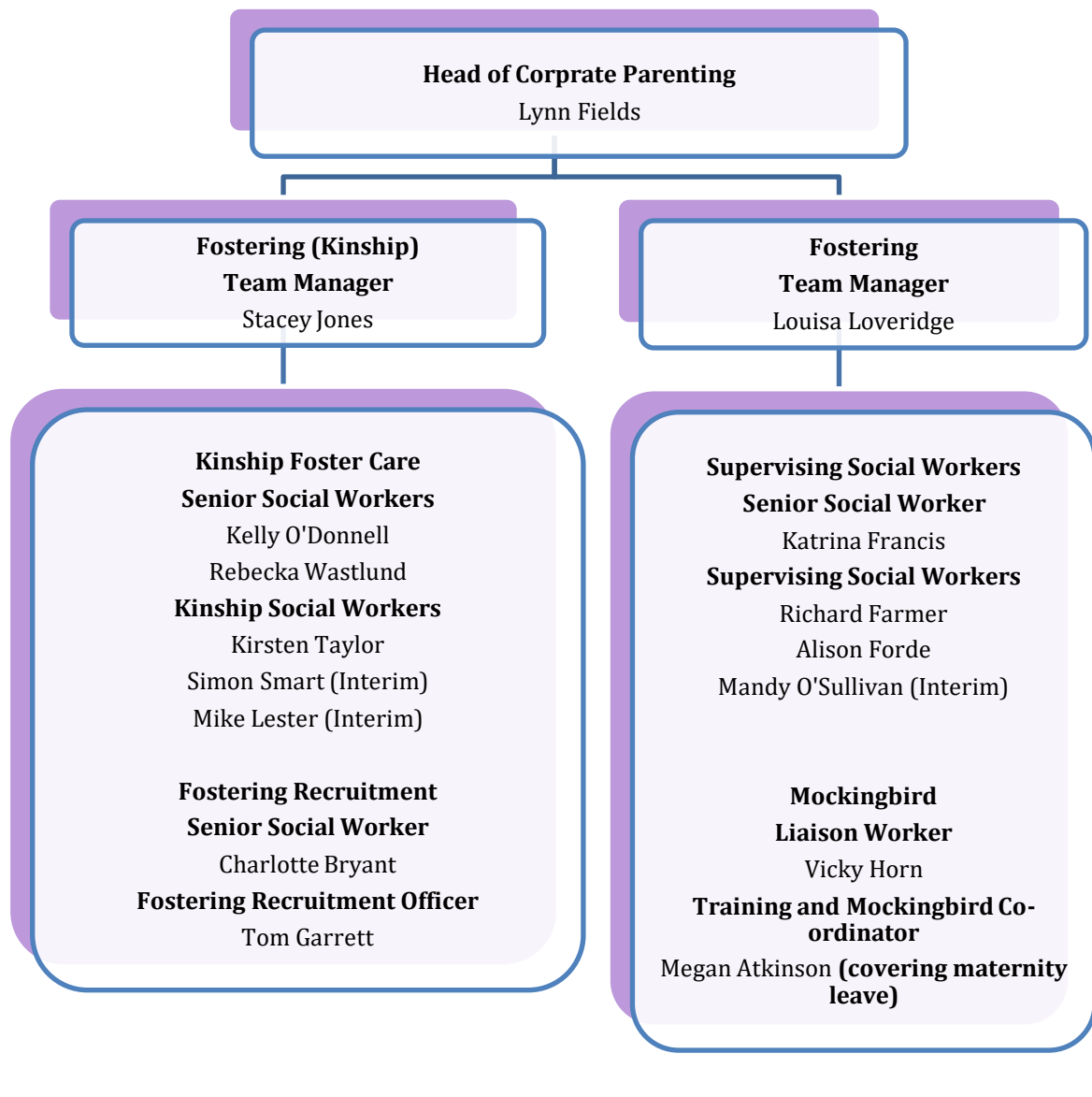
This includes any allegation against a Foster Carer. The Fostering Service has a policy and procedure for investigating allegations made against Foster Carers, this has been made available to all carers.

9. Management, Staffing and Service Structure

The Fostering Service is part of Children's Services under the overall leadership of the Director of Children's Services, Claire Shiels. The Director reports to the Chief Executive and also to the Corporate Parenting Board.

The Corporate Parenting Board meet regularly to oversee care provided to children in care and those leaving care. It includes elected members, the Director of Children's Services, the Assistant Director, Head of Corporate Parenting, Head of Virtual School, Young Director, Foster Carer representatives, the Designated Nurse for Children in Care and young people.

The staffing structure of the Fostering Service:



The Agency Decision Maker for the Fostering Service is the Head of Corporate Parenting.

There is an Independent Chair of the Fostering Panel which meets twice a month. Fostering Panel has a dedicated foster panel advisor and there is an Independent Fostering Reviewing Officer who has recently joined the service.

10. Functions of the Fostering Service Pre Foster Care Approval

Recruitment of Foster Carers

A Marketing, Recruitment and Retention strategy is in place that supports the recruitment of a sufficient number and range of local foster carers to meet the needs of North Somerset's children in care. This is reviewed annually and delivers a recruitment campaign for all types of fostering.

Information about fostering can be obtained from the North Somerset Fostering website and preliminary enquiries made. [Fostering North Somerset](#)

Fostering North Somerset's website contains information on fostering and contact numbers for the team. Following the initial enquiry there will be a visit by a social worker to complete an initial home assessment.

Assessment of Foster carers

Prospective carers are well prepared for the fostering task through preapproval training and an assessment of suitability. Checks and references are obtained in accordance with the fostering regulations to support the assessment.

The fostering assessment should be completed within 6 months. At the end of the process the assessment will have explored the prospective carers knowledge of childcare, assessed general parenting skills, their ability to work in partnership with professionals and the families of children in care and their commitment to learning and development.

Pre-Approval Training

All prospective foster carers must attend a preparation course known as the Skills to Foster (STF); STF is delivered by social workers and experienced foster carers.

STF is usually delivered over three days and the following topics are covered:

- What do Foster Carers do?
- Who are the Children and Young People?
- Working together
- Health and health promotion
- Education and Health
- Safer Caring
- Understanding behaviour
- Moving on

Where a couple are being assessed both applicants are expected to attend.

Transfer of Foster Carers from another fostering agency

North Somerset supports carers to transfer from other agencies and follows the Fostering Network transfer protocol.

11. Functions of the Fostering Panel (pre and post approval)

North Somerset has one fostering panel which meets twice a month.

The Fostering Panel is established, maintained and supported to meet the following requirements: Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011; Children Act Guidance Volume 4: Fostering Services 2011; The Fostering Services: National Minimum

Standards 2011 and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013. It has a central list of members with a diverse range of personal and professional backgrounds relevant to fostering. The panel is chaired by a suitably experienced independent person. There is an interview process for new panel members, and they are provided with an induction. Annual reviews are undertaken with all panel members and regular training is also provided.

The Fostering Panel has a number of functions:

- To consider applications for approval and recommend whether or not a person is suitable to act as a Foster Carer, and if so on what terms should they be approved e.g. number and age of children to be placed. This includes Kinship Carers.
- To consider the first and every third review of newly approved carers, and any subsequent reviews referred to it by the Fostering Service. This includes the consideration of complaints and allegations made against Foster Carers.
- To oversee the quality of assessments carried out by the Fostering Service.
- To provide advice and make recommendations on any other matters or cases referred to the panel by the Fostering Service.
- To approve and review Supported Lodgings providers.

A Fostering Panel can only deal with any business if it is quorate. This means at least five members need to be present, including either the Chair or Vice Chair and a Social Worker who has at least 3 years relevant post qualifying experience.

Fostering Panel provides a key quality assurance function for North Somerset Council and makes recommendations to the ADM who is responsible for the ratification of foster panel's recommendations.

The ADM decisions are made within 7 working days of receipt of the recommendation and final set of panel minutes (NMS 14.9). Once the decision has been made this must be given verbally to the applicant or Foster Carer within 2 working days and confirmed in writing within 5 working days (Regulation 27, NMS 14.10). Decision letters are sent by the panel administrators. If the decision is not to recommend approval as a Foster Carer information is provided about the appeals process and independent review process.

Prospective Foster Carer Approvals

Applicants are strongly encouraged to attend Fostering Panel with the Social Worker who has undertaken their assessment. Panel members understand the applicants can be apprehensive about attending and so they do all they can to put applicants at their ease. The Panel Chair will meet with applicants before they join the meeting and offer them the opportunity to hear the questions Panel are going to ask. Questions are related to their application and the assessment. The Fostering Service maintains a register of people who have been approved as Foster Carers.

Annual Reviews of Approval

All approved Foster Carers are reviewed annually (Regulation 28).

When undertaking an annual review, the Fostering Service must make enquiries and obtain which it considers necessary to review whether the Foster Carer and their household remains suitable. This will include feedback from children who have been placed with the Foster Carer, carers own family members and the child's Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer.

Termination of Approval

A Foster Carer may decide to cease fostering for a number of reasons. Written notice to terminate approval can be given at any time, in which case the approval is terminated 28 days after the Fostering Service receives the notice. However, it is an expectation that Foster Carers and the Fostering Service work together for the child's interest, and this period can be extended to allow for planning and good transitions. Any relevant information which may inform any future reference or consideration of the person's suitability to foster should be clearly recorded on file (Regulation 28).

The Fostering Service may reach the decision that a particular carer is no longer suitable to foster, this may be due to serious concerns about the standard of care provided. In these circumstances, Foster Carers can be provided with independent advice and support from a worker employed by The Fostering Network (a support service for Foster Carers) and a review should be undertaken and recommendations for termination of approval must be made formally to the Fostering Panel.

If Fostering Panel makes a recommendation to the ADM that the Foster Carer is unsuitable to remain registered and this is ratified by the ADM (qualifying determination) then a termination of approval letter is sent to the Foster Carer stating the reasons. The Foster Carer then has 28 days within which to make a representation to the decision maker or to apply to the Independent

Reviewing Mechanism (IRM) for an independent review (Regulation 27). If no representation is received within 28 days, the decision stands.

12. Functions of the Fostering Service post approval:

Support for Foster Carers

North Somerset Fostering Service values the work foster carers do and the significant contribution they make to the lives of children and young people in their care. The right support to foster carers is crucial to a successful home life.

Each fostering household has an allocated Supervising Social Worker who:

- Offers support and supervision visits.
- Liaises with the Children's Placements Team and advises on and supports placement matching.
- Provides information about training and development and supports and encourages carers to attend training.
- The child's social worker takes a lead role in Placement Planning Meetings, with the Supervising Social Worker (SSW) supporting.
- Attends, supports and sometimes chairs Placement Support Meetings. These are identified and held where placements may be fragile and where additional support is required.
- Attends, supports and sometimes chairs Placement stability meetings. These are identified where notice has been given by a Foster Carer.
- Will attend children in care reviews as required and asked to do so to support the fostering family and children.
- Is responsible for ensuring all statutory checks are up to date.
- Undertakes the Foster Carer's annual review which is chaired by the Independent Fostering Reviewing Officer.

The Service also offers:

- Foster carers and children in care the opportunity to receive consistent support from a Mockingbird hub.
- A wide range of coffee mornings which are used as a way of supporting carers.
- Support from CONSULT – a team comprising a specialist social worker, clinical psychologist and family support workers who work with foster

carers to help them develop a range of responses to children and young people affected by trauma.

Payments

All approved foster carers receive an allowance and a skills payment for the child they are caring for, this includes temporarily approved foster carers. Fostering allowances and fees are reviewed each year and the Fostering Fees and Allowances guidance is updated and provides details of these.

Training

North Somerset Fostering Service recognises that fostering can be a demanding and complex task. We are committed to providing good quality training that is accessible and relevant to all foster carers. Foster Carers also have the benefit of being able to access any appropriate training available to North Somerset Council employees.

In line with North Somerset's skills progression scheme, there is a requirement that carers will undertake a minimum number of courses each year in line with their level of approval and their progression onto higher levels.

Training, Support and Development Standards have been developed by The Department for Education to ensure that people working with children, young people and their families have the best possible training, support and advice. Foster

Carers are expected to complete the standards within the first year of their approval (18 months for Kinship Carers).

Foster Carers are encouraged and supported to take responsibility for their own professional development. We have a Training and Mockingbird Co-ordinator who will support with this. For carers who would prefer on-line training (e-learning) we have an extensive range of training via the Training Hub. If carers do not have the relevant equipment for them to access training we can lend them an iPad to complete this.

Out of hours support

Out of hours support is available from the Emergency Duty Team. North Somerset carers have 24-hour telephone access to trained counsellors as part of the Fostering Network membership. Foster Carers in Mockingbird Constellations have support from the Mockingbird Hub Home carers.

Other support provided to Foster Carers:

- Foster Carers Handbook
- Free Fostering Network membership, including access to events, information and advice, and a number of discounts.
- Fostering Network counsellors can also provide guidance on a range of issues including finance and legal matters.
- A 'leisure key' card that provides free, unlimited access to all North Somerset Council leisure facilities and schemes.

- Foster carer coffee mornings, social events and children's activities including summer outings.

13. Foster Carer Participation

Membership of North Somerset Foster Carer collective. This is open to all carers and is run and organised by a group of Foster Carers. Members of the collective have the opportunity to meet with the Team Manager, Head of Service and Assistant Director to offer feedback on what is working well and areas for improvement. The collective also supports North Somerset Fostering in organising of events for children and young people.

14. Complaints

All complaints by Foster Carers are taken seriously. Foster Carers are able to use North Somerset Council's complaints procedure. Complaints will be resolved informally where possible by the Supervising Social Worker or their Team Manager.

Where this is not possible, they may take it to the Head of Corporate Parenting or use the complaints procedure by contacting: Complaints and Customer Services. Tel: 01275 882171 or email complaints.manager@n-somerset.gov.uk

Or write to:

North Somerset Council, Complaints Manager, Town Hall, Walliscote Grove Road, Weston-Super-Mare, BS23 1UJ

Foster Carers are provided with information about what happens when a complaint or allegation is made specifically against them as a carer, including the process and timescales involved. The allegations policy sets out the process for investigations into complaints and allegations and the Head of Service for Corporate Parenting will inform Ofsted in individual cases where required. North Somerset Council maintains a record of all complaints and allegations made against Foster Carers and their outcomes.

15. Equal Opportunities

North Somerset's Fostering Service works to the North Somerset Council's Equality and Diversity Policy which is available on the council website. The Fostering Service will treat all service users fairly, openly and with respect throughout the fostering process. Applicants wishing to be approved as Foster Carers will be considered irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability providing the fostering service considers they can safely and appropriately meet the needs of children throughout their childhood and into independence. Every attempt will be made to find a fostering family which meets a child or young person's emotional and developmental needs taking into consideration their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability.

16. Ofsted

Ofsted is the single, independent inspectorate for all Social Care Services in England. It is responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting fostering services under the provisions of the Care Standards Act, 2000.

The one point of contact for all questions, queries and complaints to Ofsted is the

Ofsted National Business Unit (NBU). The telephone number is 0300 123 1231. The NBU manages all calls and will redirect them as necessary. The NBU can also be contacted at enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk or at the following address:

Ofsted National Business Unit

St Ann's Square, Manchester,

M2 7LA