

NORTH SOMERSET FOSTER CARERS' HANDBOOK

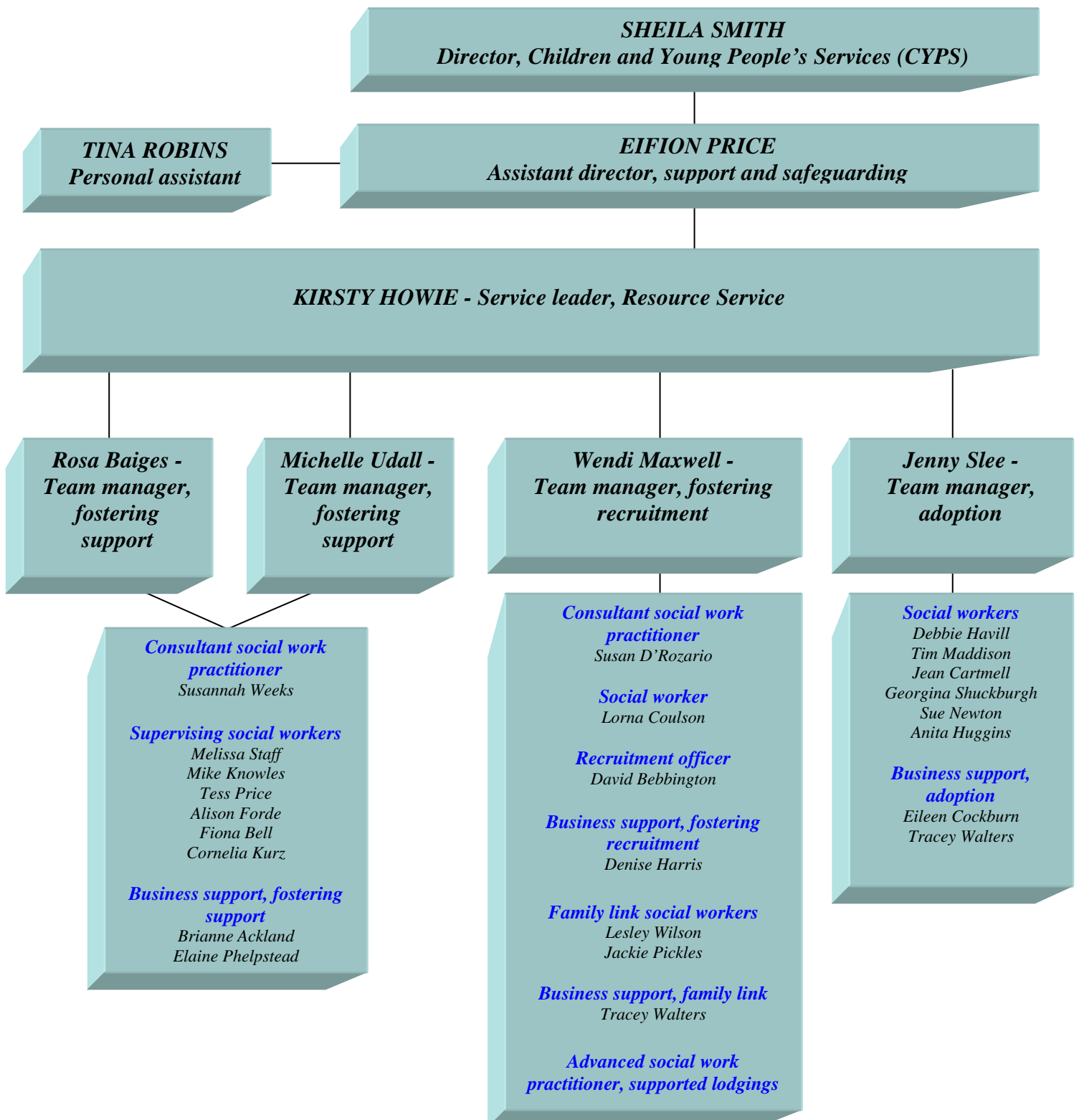
Section 1: Fostering for North Somerset Council

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Fostering for North Somerset Council

Structure and organisation



The team around the child

North Somerset Council's Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) are divided into a number of teams. The main team/services that you are likely to have contact with are:

The Resource Service

Teams within the Resource Service work together to offer services to children and young people who are looked after or who have left care. Most of the workers are based at 12 Clifton Road, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 1BL.

Fostering teams

As a foster carer, you will work in partnership with the fostering service. This service is formed by two main teams:

❑ Fostering recruitment team

This team is based at the Town Hall and is responsible for the recruitment and assessment of all foster carers. The team also recruits, assesses and supports, short break carers, who provide respite care for children with disabilities, and supporting lodgings hosts for children aged 16 and older.

This team send respond to initial enquiries, send information packs and invite prospective carers to information evenings. If prospective carers wish to proceed after reading the information pack, they will receive an initial visit from a social worker to discuss their circumstances and potential schemes in more detail.

All prospective mainstream foster carers are then required to attend a three day preparation course, entitled 'Skills to foster'. Once completed, and if applicants are still interested in becoming foster carers, they will be allocated an assessing social worker. The assessing social worker will complete a detailed assessment of the person and compile a report. This assessment is then presented to the fostering panel.



Fostering recruitment team

Tel: 01275 888999

❑ Fostering support team

The supervising social workers within this team are responsible for the individual and group support of all North Somerset Council foster carers. Each newly approved foster carer, and family and friends carer, is allocated a supervising social worker (SSW) from the support team.

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Within the Resource Service there is a duty team made up of social workers, SSWs and leaving care personal advisors. The duty team can respond to general enquiries and requests for assistance, advice and support from foster carers, if their own SSW or the childcare social worker is not available.



Fostering support team – Resource Service

12 Clifton Road, Weston-super-Mare,
BS23 1BL
Tel: 01934 421900

The adoption team

The adoption team is responsible for the preparation and assessment of prospective adopters, including step-parent adoptions and adoptions of children from overseas.

This team is also responsible for helping match children with approved adopters. They present a matching report and post-adoption support package to the adoption panel when a child is to be placed with an approved adopter.

Childcare teams

The staff members of each team are a mixture of case holding social workers, social work assistants, leaving care personal advisors, multi-agency workers and administrators.

When a decision is made for a child to remain in care long-term, the case is transferred to the Resource Service. Social workers at the Resource Service generally hold cases for young people who are in long-term care, young people who are preparing to leave care, and care leavers who continue to be supported by the department.

Multi-agency professionals

Within the Resource Service there are also multi-agency workers. These include:

- ❑ The head teachers of the Virtual School
- ❑ The looked after children's nurse



For further information on **Educational attainment, health and wellbeing** see section 4 of this handbook: When a child comes to live with you

- ❑ Connexions worker
- ❑ A housing worker
- ❑ A young persons' communications worker



For further information on services for young people leaving care see **Moving into independence** section 5 of this handbook: Preparing children to move on.

❏ CONSULT



For further information on CONSULT see **Other professional support** section 8 of this handbook: Support and development.

Community-based teams

While the focus for foster carers is generally on children looked after, a large amount of the work undertaken by CYPS is about offering services to children and young people within the community. The majority of children CYPS workers are involved with do not enter the care system and remain within their families. North Somerset Council has a duty to support families in order to keep them together and offer services to 'children in need'. The area based teams generally hold cases for children who are fostered, until they have a permanence plan.

Their involvement with children looked after is generally because these children are likely to be looked after short-term.

As a foster carer you are likely to have most dealings with the following teams:

Referral and assessment team

The referral and assessment team is based in the Town Hall in Weston-super-Mare. They are the first point of contact for all new referrals concerning children. When a referral is received they are responsible for deciding whether there is a role for the department and the level of intervention required. Much of their work focuses on Child Protection (CP) and they respond to concerns through an assessment process.

The referral and assessment team receive referrals from the community and respond to referrals according to the level of concern raised. If there are low level needs or a requirement for preventative work these referrals are passed on to the locality services.

When a serious allegation is made about a foster carer and it meets the child protection criteria, the referral and assessment team leader takes responsibility for initiating and co-ordinating the investigation.



For further information on allegations against foster carers see **Complaints and allegations** section 7 of this handbook: Support and development.

When a referral is made to this team and the young person is taken into foster care in an emergency, they will be involved in placing the child with foster carers. Because these placements are made in an emergency, the information

provided at the point of placement can be fairly limited. Once the local authority is able to establish how best to meet the child's needs, the case is generally transferred to either an area team or the Resource Service.



Referral and assessment team

Tel: 01275 888272

Community family teams

The community family teams are responsible for providing:

- ❑ An ongoing social work service to children assessed by the referral and assessment team and determined to be eligible for a service
- ❑ A social work service to children who are looked after, generally on a short-term basis, or are being adopted
- ❑ A social work service to children subject to safeguarding plans
- ❑ A social work service to support children in need

Referrals are made through the referral and assessment team.

Community family teams – First point of contact is CYPS reception (ask for the team or the social worker and reception will transfer you)

Town Hall
Walliscote Grove Road
Weston-super-Mare
BS23 1UJ



Tel: 01275 888888

Disabled children's team

Subject to an assessment children and young people with complex additional needs may be eligible for services from the disabled children's team. These may include:

- ❑ Social work assessment and support
- ❑ Short breaks
- ❑ Occupational therapy
- ❑ Support/access to mainstream and specialist resources.

The disabled children's team works with various organisations, e.g. Mencap, Springboard and the youth and community leisure service, to assist children with disabilities in accessing community resources such as after school clubs, youth clubs, summer holiday schemes and Saturday club.

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The team also provides 'buddies' to support children and young people in accessing leisure and community activities. They also provide family link carers, who offer short breaks to children with disabilities.

Some services, such as family fun, are 'open access' and other services are offered following an assessment.



Disabled children's team

The Campus
Highlands Lane
Locking Castle
Weston-super-Mare
BS24 7DX



Tel: 01934 427622 / 01934 427558

Youth Offending Team (YOT)

YOT is committed to:

- ❑ The swift administration of justice so that every young person accused of breaking the law has their case dealt with as quickly as possible
- ❑ Confronting young offenders with the consequences of their offending for themselves, their family, their victims and the community
- ❑ Punishment proportionate to the seriousness and persistence of offending
- ❑ Reinforcing the responsibilities of parents
- ❑ Helping young offenders to tackle problems associated with their offending and to develop a sense of personal responsibility
- ❑ Enhancing the life prospects of young people and addressing factors, which minimise involvement in anti-social/offending behaviour.
- ❑ Maintaining, as a cornerstone of all provision, equal access, equal opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice.

For further information on the range of services provided by YOT, visit the North Somerset Council website and see 'Introduction to North Somerset Youth Offending Team leaflet' on the youth offending web page.



Youth Offending Team (YOT)

57 Oxford Street
Weston-super-mare
BS23 1TR



Tel: 01275 888350

Now you are a foster carer

North Somerset Council fostering service approves foster carers following the guidelines of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. When couples or any other partnership apply to foster, both people will be jointly assessed and approved as foster carers.

After being approved at fostering panel, you will receive written notification of your terms of approval, including:

- ❑ Type of fostering (e.g. short term, long term or respite)
- ❑ The age-range of children you're approved for and their gender
- ❑ The maximum number of children you can foster at any one time.

These terms of approval describe the optimal fostering situation for you and your family.

Depending on your approval terms, the maximum number of children than a foster care can look after at any given time is **three**. The exceptions are if all children belong to the same family and it is paramount to maintain the sibling group together, or if there is a specific agreement for you to look after a child who may be known to you or requires your specific skills. Exceptions end when the

The Children Act 1989 introduced a 'usual fostering limit' of three foster children in any foster home. This fostering limit was introduced to acknowledge the complex needs of children looked after.

Whenever possible, the fostering service will place children with you according to your approval terms. The exceptions are:

- ❑ Where it may be considered that your skills are the best suited to look after a specific child
- ❑ Where it contributes to placement stability of a child who placed with you
- ❑ If we place a sibling group.

The team leader in the fostering support team authorises these exceptions in consultation with your SSW and they are endorsed at the next available fostering panel. These exceptions end when the child, or children, move on from the foster home.

While you are a foster carer for North Somerset Council you cannot be approved by another fostering service, unless that original approval with us has been terminated. This is because, according to the Fostering Services Regulations, a foster carer can only be approved by one fostering agency at any time.

The foster carer [should be] informed orally of the decision maker's decision within two working days and written confirmation is sent to them within five working days.

Fostering Services' NMS: 14.10

Written notification of your approval is essential before a child can be placed with you

The only exception to this is where an immediate placement with a connected person is made under regulation 24.



For more information on placements with a connected person see:

- ❑ **North Somerset Council website**
www.n-somerset.gov.uk/carewizard/Placement_with_Connected_Person_Process
- ❑ **Department of Education:** Family and friends care. Statutory guidance for local authorities.

Foster carers' agreement

Under the Fostering Service Regulations 2011 all foster carers are legally required to sign a foster care agreement. This agreement states the terms and conditions of the partnership working between foster carers and the fostering service.

All of our foster carers will receive a copy their individual foster care agreement before commencing fostering.

Wherever possible, foster carers will be allocated an assessing social worker with 15d days of receiving their foster carer agreement.

Read your foster carer agreement carefully and discuss it fully with your supervising social worker. By doing this, you will gain a good understanding of what you can expect from North Somerset Council, as well as the expectations that we have of you as a foster carer.

Information in your foster carer's agreement will include:¹

- ❑ The terms of your approval
- ❑ The support and training you will receive as a foster carer
- ❑ Procedure for the annual foster carers' review. This is the formal appraisal of your practice and takes place every year. This report will be presented to the fostering panel after the first year of your approval and then every three years. The fostering panel will consider the information on the review and make a recommendation on your re-approval
- ❑ Procedures for the placement of children and placement plans
- ❑ Arrangements for meeting any legal liabilities arising from a placement e.g. damage caused by a child placed with you
- ❑ Procedures for making complaints and representations.

The foster carers' agreement also states your responsibilities as a North Somerset Council foster carer.



See '**What can you expect from us and what do we expect from you?**' in this section of the handbook

The Fostering Network

After you're approved and you sign the fostering agreement, North Somerset Council provides you with membership of the Fostering Network. This membership gives you access to free, independent advice.

The Fostering Network is the leading, national, fostering charity. Members of the Fostering Network include the majority of local authorities in the UK, independent fostering providers, local foster care associations, and health and social services trusts. They work with fostering services, foster carers and other relevant organisations to improve the lives of children in foster care.

The Fostering Network offers an advice line provides a specialised and bespoke service to members, and others interested in fostering, on legal matters, finance and welfare benefits.



The Fostering Network advice line

Tel: 0207 620 6400

The Fostering Network also operates a confidential advice line called Fosterline. This is available for all foster carers in England and is funded by the Department for Education and Skills. It provides independent and impartial advice about fostering issues including:

¹ The Fostering Services Regulations 2011. Schedule 5

- ❑ Concerns about a child's future
- ❑ Allegations and complaints
- ❑ Changes in legislation
- ❑ Financial matters
- ❑ How to access other services and support



Fosterline (Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm)
Telephone and textphone: 0800 040 7675

Other services the Fostering Network provides include:

- ❑ An extensive library and user friendly website www.fostering.net
- ❑ Mediation service
- ❑ Training and consultancy
Campaigning and policy development
- ❑ Publications and resources
- ❑ A variety of publications

We pay for the annual individual membership of all its approved foster carers.

Membership benefits include:

- ❑ Regularly receive the foster care magazine
- ❑ Access to information about national training courses and information leaflets
- ❑ An annual copy of 'Foster Care Finance', with advice and information on the cost of caring for a child
- ❑ Free legal telephone advice
- ❑ Legal representation in actions brought against the foster carer, as a result of the fostering activity
- ❑ Access to Fosterline.

You are advised to contact us
to confirm that your
membership is up-to-date



The Fostering Network
87 Blackfriars Road
London
SE1 8HA



Tel: 020 7620 6400

www.fostering.net

What can you expect from us and what do we expect from you



For information of what you can expect as a foster carer for North Somerset Council, please see section 7 of this handbook:

Support and development

As a foster carer, we² expect that when a child is placed with you, you WILL:

- ❑ Treat them as if the child was from your own family
- ❑ Promote the child's welfare, regardless to the length of time the child will be with you. This includes the child's physical and emotional health, their education, independence skills, social presentation and identity
- ❑ NEVER use corporal punishment as a way of administering discipline
- ❑ You will always safeguard the children in your care
- ❑ Keep any information on the child confidential and will only disclose information to a third party with authorisation from us, and only when it is necessary for the welfare of the child
- ❑ Comply with the terms of any placement plan
- ❑ Comply with our policies and procedures
- ❑ Cooperate with OFSTED inspectors
- ❑ Inform your supervising social worker, the childcare social worker or relevant manager about the child's progress and of any significant events affecting the child
- ❑ Work in partnership with social care professionals to achieve the best possible outcomes for the child
- ❑ Consider the importance of offering a stable placement to a child in your care
- ❑ Work with your supervising social worker and other professionals to overcome difficulties
- ❑ Give a minimum of 28 days' notice before ending a placement.

² The Fostering Service Regulations: Schedule 5

Events that you need to notify us of

All significant events relating to the health and protection of children fostered by the service are notified by the registered person to the appropriate authorities.

Fostering services' NMS: 29

As a foster carer, you are required to notify the fostering service all significant changes in your personal and household situation. Changes could have an impact on the health, well-being and protection of a child in your care, and the fostering service has the responsibility to assess whether there is a potential risk to any child placed with you.

[The foster care agreement requires foster carers to give North Somerset Council written notice, without delay, of any changes to their address, the composition of the household or their personal circumstances, as these may affect your capacity to care for any child placed.]

Fostering services' regulations: Schedule 5

ALWAYS notify the Fostering Service of any changes in your personal and household situation as early as possible.

With this action you demonstrate an understanding of the importance of safer caring and will enable us to assess any potential impact of the change on the health, well-being and protection of the child.

Some changes in your personal or household circumstances may necessitate a **re-assessment of the foster family** and a report being presented to the fostering panel. We have an obligation to assess the potential risk that each change in your circumstances may have on a child in your care and decide whether a re-assessment will be necessary.

You are advised to discuss the intention to initiate a new relationship with someone who will be either be living with you, spending significant time in your house or sharing the fostering task, with your SSW at the early stages of this decision.

Your SSW will advise you if we will have to assess your partner as potential foster carer and update your assessment with regards to the new relationship.

North Somerset Council has to notify OFSTED and/or other responsible authorities of any serious concern about the emotional or mental health of a child (NS 29.3). Under the fostering regulations³, we have to notify regarding:

- ❑ The death of a child placed with foster carers

³ The Fostering Regulations (England) 2011. Regulation 36 & Schedule 7

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- ❑ Serious illness or accident involving a child placed with a foster carer
- ❑ Information of a person working for the service who is unsuitable to work with children
- ❑ The outbreak of any infectious disease at the home of a foster carer that, in the opinion of a general practitioner attending the home, is serious
- ❑ The allegation that a child placed with foster carers has committed a serious offence
- ❑ The involvement, or suspected involvement, of a child placed with foster carers in prostitution
- ❑ Any serious incident relating to a child placed with foster carers, necessitating in police involvement
- ❑ A child going missing from their placement
- ❑ Serious complaints about any of our approved foster carers
- ❑ Any child protection concern involving a child placed with foster carers

We also require you to inform us of any changes to:

- ❑ The household composition
- ❑ Your family circumstances, including difficult milestones for your children, stresses between you and your partner, plans for separation or plans to start a new relationship
- ❑ Your health, or the health of anyone in your household or family
- ❑ Your employment situation. We have to be satisfied that your new working arrangements will not conflict with fostering.

If there are any changes in your situation, inform your supervising social worker, who will notify the child's social worker and other relevant people.

If you are ever in any doubt about something, let us know so that we can make a decision on what needs to happen.

In addition you need to notify us if you, or any household members, are involved with the police.

Foster carers' annual review

A review must take place not more than a year after your approval, and of intervals of not more than three years after this or whenever we deem necessary.

Fostering services' regulations, 2011: Regulation 28

North Somerset Council conducts foster carer reviews annually and these are endorsed by the fostering team manager.

Your first review as a foster carer will take place between 10 and 12 months of your approval. As part of the review process you will be sent a consultation form to record your views for the review meeting. The review considers any changes in your household and accommodation, and revisits the health and safety checklist. We will also review your safer caring policy and pet questionnaire to ensure they meet the needs of the children placed with you.

Your supervising social worker will compile all the above information in a report and will include your views and the views of:

- ❑ Members of your family/household.
- ❑ Children who have been placed with you throughout the year
- ❑ The parents and social workers of children who have been placed with you throughout the year
- ❑ Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs).

You will receive a written account of the review for your records.

Foster carer reviews are thorough so that we can assess ongoing suitability to foster.

Fostering services' NMS: 13.8

The review assesses whether it is suitable for you to continue fostering and whether we need to change the terms of approval, such as the number of children you can foster, their age ranges or your skill level. You will have the opportunity to comment on the report, which will then be endorsed by the fostering support team manager.

The annual review is also an opportunity to look at your skills and those areas where you have excelled as a foster carer. It identifies your training and support needs, the needs of the children placed with you, and areas where you may need additional advice and support. The review may also look at complaints, allegations or concerns. In addition, the review offers a framework to discuss any potential progress to the next skills level.

After your first Annual Foster Carers' Review (AFCR), your registration as a foster carer will be renewed and signed by the fostering support team manager. Every three years your review will be presented to the fostering panel.

Remember: Your attendance to panel is important and your opinions are valued.

Where there have been complaints, concerns or allegations about the standard of care provided, we may present the review for fostering panel's recommendation before the end of three-year period.

We may decide to hold a review more frequently if:

- ☐ There has been a change of your personal/household circumstances,
- ☐ We have received a complaint or there has been an unplanned move by a child
- ☐ We consider it necessary
- ☐ You consider it necessary.

Annual reviews will seek advice/recommendation from the fostering panel. The agency decision maker will make a final decision about changes to your terms of approval.

The fostering panel

The fostering panel and agency decision maker make timely, quality and appropriate recommendations/decisions in line with the overriding objective to promote the welfare of children in foster care.

Fostering services' NMS: 14

Fostering panels are multi-disciplinary bodies with a considerable element of independence from us. As independent body they have a quality assurance role; remaining objective and challenging poor practice. The fostering panel can only make **recommendations**. The **decision** following the recommendation is the responsibility of the agency decision maker.

The fostering panel meets every three weeks, on Wednesday morning in the Town Hall. In order to make a recommendation and in order to be quorate, the fostering panel must be chaired by an independent member, have a minimum of three other independent members and must have a social worker present.

We keep a central record of the fostering panel members. All members of the fostering panel are CRB checked and sign confidentiality agreements.

Fostering panel is responsible for:

- ❑ Considering the suitability of foster carers and recommending their approval, re-approval or de-registration
- ❑ Overseeing the quality of our assessments
- ❑ Providing advice on any fostering-related issue that we present.

Termination of approval

At times, the fostering panel may recommend changing a foster carer's registration or de-registering a foster carer.

North Somerset Council may de-register foster carers as a result of:

- ❑ Changes in the carer's personal or household circumstances
- ❑ A serious concern about the foster carer's practice
- ❑ An allegation that has been raised.

If you are in disagreement with the panel's recommendation, you can appeal.

Where a recommendation is made to change or terminate your approval, the agency decision maker will write to inform you of your options. These options are:

1. To accept the decision and take no further action. The formal decision will be made within 28 days
2. To appeal within 28 days to the agency decision maker. The appeal may be referred to the fostering panel for their consideration. The fostering panel will take into consideration any new information provided by you and will make a recommendation to the agency decision maker. The involvement of the fostering panel will then be concluded, however, if you are still in disagreement, you can follow North Somerset Council's complaint procedure
3. To apply to the Secretary of State for an **Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)**. The IRM will review the decision (known as the "qualifying determination") with an independent review panel.

The Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

The IRM is a review process. If you decide to apply to the IRM to challenge the fostering panel's decision you must apply to them in writing within 28 days of the decision. If the IRM believe it is appropriate, an independent review is held and a copy of the independent panel recommendations is sent to the agency decision maker. The agency decision maker will take these recommendations into account alongside the original fostering panel recommendations when making the final decision about registration.

Resignations

When you are approved as a foster carer your name and basic information is kept in a register. If subsequently, you decide that you no longer wish to foster, you will need to send us a letter of resignation. Your supervising social worker will then write a de-registration report and will notify the fostering panel after 28 days.

Once the de-registration report has been seen by the fostering panel, your name will be removed from the register and you will receive a letter confirming you de-registration.