

# NORTH SOMERSET FOSTER CARERS' HANDBOOK

## Section 3: Preparing for a placement

### INDEX

1. [The children's pledge](#)
2. [Matching process and placement team](#)
3. [Pre-placement considerations](#)
  - ❑ [Child looked after paperwork: Forms and documents](#)
  - ❑ [Planning and care plan](#)
  - ❑ [Placement Planning Meeting \(PPM\)](#)
  - ❑ [Placement Information Record \(PIR\)](#)
4. [Welcoming a child into your home](#)
5. [Equipment](#)

## Preparing for a placement

### The children's pledge

The following views and comments were taken from a consultation with children and young people looked after in North Somerset, and are now included in our pledge to children and young people looked after:

- ☐ We want to be included as a part of your family and to be taken on holiday with you
- ☐ We want to be respected, listened to, understood and believed
- ☐ We want you to keep us safe
- ☐ We want to be encouraged to lead a healthy lifestyle and attend regular checkups
- ☐ We would like you to give us advice on our diet and healthy food
- ☐ We need to be cared for, fed and clothed
- ☐ It is important that we have contact with our own family, if it is safe and if we want it, and if we can't have contact with our family we want you to explain why
- ☐ We should be given pocket money and you should explain if you withhold it
- ☐ We need to have a savings account
- ☐ We want you to help us make our own decisions and be given choices, with support
- ☐ We want to be encouraged and allowed to make friends, and be able to have friends to visit/sleepover
- ☐ We want to be encouraged and allowed to keep in contact with old friends
- ☐ We need to be given clear boundaries and structures that we understand
- ☐ We want to have the rules of the house explained to us
- ☐ We need our own bedroom
- ☐ We want to be supported in our education and given help with homework
- ☐ We want you to attend school meetings and functions
- ☐ We want to have access to support and to be taught the skills we need for our independence
- ☐ We want to be supported and not to be judged
- ☐ We want to be invited to activities, consultation groups and events
- ☐ We want you to help us fulfil our potential, dreams and aspirations.

## Matching process and placement team

[The fostering service] needs to facilitate an appropriate match between the carer and child, capable of meeting the child's needs and consistent with the wishes and feelings of the child, so maximising the likelihood of a stable placement.

*Fostering services' NMS: 15*

Once you have been approved as a foster carer for North Somerset Council, your profile and terms of registration will be sent to the children's placement service. When a child is taken into care, the childcare social worker will then make a referral to the children's placement service.

The children's placement service have the responsibility to identify suitable foster carers who will be able to meet the individual needs of North Somerset Council's children looked after. If they identify that you may be a good match for a child in need of a placement, they will discuss the potential match with your supervising social worker or fostering team manager. With their agreement, they will approach you to discuss the needs of the child and whether it the child is a suitable match for your family.

Remember: you know your family and circumstances best. If a potential placement does not feel right for your family, you can say NO.

If a placement is a good match for the whole family, it is less likely to end unplanned.

### Matching considerations

[When] children are carefully matched to a foster placement. Foster carers [should be provided with] full information about the child.

*Fostering services' NMS: 11.3*

#### 1. **Providing a suitable physical environment for the foster child**

This standard focuses on providing a suitable physical environment for children looked after. There is an emphasis on the safety and homeliness of the environment.

When looking for a suitable foster home, the children's placement team will ensure that the foster home has sufficient space so that any child placed has privacy.

In the foster home, each child over the age of three should have their own bedroom. If this is not possible, the sharing of a bedroom is agreed by each child's responsible authority, and each child has their own area within the bedroom.

*Fostering services' NMS: 10.6*

During your fostering assessment, you should have had a discussion about your proposed sleeping arrangements once you start fostering. This is important to assist with the matching process as some children may have specific needs. Some children may need to be located downstairs or next to the foster carers' bedroom, for example.

North Somerset Council's view is that all children over the age of three should have their own bedroom, unless there are exceptional circumstances. We do not encourage foster carers' own children sharing bedrooms to accommodate a foster child. Before any decision is made an assessment of all children's needs is required.

In the unlikely event that consideration is given to specific children to share a bedroom, the fostering service, according to the standards, will take into account any potential history of bullying, abuse or abusive behaviour. It is a requirement that if a child has been abused or has abused another child, the child's needs and the needs of all other children in the home are to be assessed before any decision is made with regards to allow children sharing bedrooms, the outcome of this assessment recorded and the foster home safer caring policy renewed.

Checklist when preparing for a placement:

- ☐ Does the bedroom have sufficient space for the child or young person to play/study?
- ☐ Is the room in a suitable decorative state to meet the needs of the specific child?
- ☐ Are there sufficient books, toys and other age-appropriate items that reflect the multi-cultural society we live in?
- ☐ Do you have a family welcome album and is it up-to-date?



*Also see:* **Health and safety**

Fostering handbook; section 4: Meeting the needs of the children

## 2. **Providing an environment that is suitable to meet the needs of the child as indicated in the child's care plan**

When identifying the preferred placement for a child/young person, the children's placement team considers:

- ☐ The age and gender of the child looked after and your own children

- ❑ The child/young person's racial, cultural and linguistic background
- ❑ The wishes and feelings of the child looked after and those your children may have expressed
- ❑ Whether the placement will allow contact with birth family
- ❑ The views of the parents.

The children's placement officer also considers the care plan of the child, whenever this is available, and identifies foster families that have the skills to meet the needs of the child.

Social workers and team managers must be satisfied that a placement with foster carers is the best way of safeguarding the welfare of a child looked after, and that the specific placement identified for the child is appropriate for his/her needs.

The possibility for a child to be cared for within the extended family must always have been investigated and considered as an alternative.



*Also see:* **Care plan in pre-placement considerations**

Fostering handbook; section 3: Preparing for a placement

### 3. **Providing foster carers with all relevant information available with regards to the child looked after (NMS 11.2)**

Each foster carer is aware of all the necessary information available [about] a child's circumstances, including any significant recent events. [The aim is to help the foster carer understand and predict the child's needs and behaviours, and support the child within their household.]

*Fostering services' NMS: 3.9*

When the children's placement officer contacts you to discuss a potential match with a child, they will provide you with as much information as possible to help you to make the right decision for your family. However, in some instances, such as when a placement is needed in an emergency, the information available at that moment can be minimal.

Prior to contacting you about a child, the placement officer is expected to contact the fostering service and speak to your supervising social worker or manager for consent. This is to ensure that your current circumstances are suitable for the placement. You are advised to confirm that the fostering service is aware of, and in agreement with, the placement.



**Children's placement service**

**Tel: 01275 884420**

## Pre-placement considerations

### Child looked after paperwork: Forms and documents

This refers to certain standard forms and documents that social workers have to complete when a child becomes looked after. These forms and documents are mainly held on the Integrated Childcare System (ICS), which is consistent with the requirements and philosophy of the Children Act 1989. ICS is a purpose-built, computerised record holding system, designed to keep an on-going record of a child's background, development, health and education.

We use ICS to ensure:

- ❑ The welfare of the children and young people
- ❑ Standards of care are equivalent to those of a well-informed parent with adequate resources
- ❑ Formal systems are in place to plan and record what good parents keep in mind
- ❑ Workers, carers and families work in partnership
- ❑ That children are consulted and listened to according to their age
- ❑ That children are treated as individuals with its own specific needs
- ❑ That a child with disabilities is treated, first and foremost, as a child who has additional needs
- ❑ The overall aim of looking after children/young people away from home is to promote well being, healthy development and success; not just to prevent harm.

### Planning and care plan

The Children Act 1989 advises that pre-placement planning should take place wherever possible. The law implies that the local authority should not accommodate children at short notice, unless absolutely necessary, as the children will not know the carers.

We have a duty to ensure that every child looked after has a care plan. The care plan ensures that there are clear objectives set out for each child and young person, and that there is a strategy for achieving those objectives. The care plan ensures that all parties understand the role that accommodation will play in meeting the child/young person's needs.

The care plan must be prepared before the child is first placed by the responsible authority or, if it is not possible to do so, within ten working days of the start of the first placement.

*The Children Act 1989; Guidance and Regulations;  
Volume 2: Standard 4(2) Care Planning, Placement and Case Review, March 2011*

The court will set a timescale to complete the care plan for children who are under a care order and are placed with foster carers.

In some instances, the child's social worker will convene a '**planning meeting**', where all core professionals involved in the care of a child will discuss the child's needs and prepare a suitable care plan.

Ask for a written copy of the care plan for each child you look after. If you have not received it when the child is placed with you, you can ask your SSW for help.

The **care plan** describes the nature and purpose of the placement required for a child. It states the developmental needs of the child, and the short and long term arrangements necessary to meet the desired outcome for the child<sup>1</sup>. It is an important document in helping to identify the right placement for a child. It also monitors the progress of the placement, support services and other actions identified.

A clear care plan clarifies expectations of the placement so disappointments and confusion may be avoided. It must, whenever possible, contain the name of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), who will review the plan on a regular basis. The care plan cannot be changed unless it has been discussed with the IRO during a review.

## Placement Planning Meeting (PPM)

The aim of the Placement Planning Meeting is to draw a **placement agreement** that identifies what needs to happen in the placement to meet the needs of the child. It provides clarity for both you and the child, about how the day to day parenting tasks will be shared between you and the childcare team.

The placement agreement is negotiated between the foster carer, the child or young person (if they are old enough), the child's social worker and the child's parents (if considered appropriate). The most significant people in the child's life will be invited to the meeting.

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<sup>1</sup> The Children Act 1989. Guidance and Regulations, Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review. Regulation 5

The child's social worker or team manager has the responsibility to convene the placement planning meeting and will ensure that every child or young person needing a placement will have a placement plan. If possible, this will take place before the placement is made.

You can expect your SSW to attend the PPM and it is the fostering service's role to chair it.

It is good practice to convene placement planning meetings before the placement takes place. Unless the placement takes place under an emergency, the child's social worker will discuss your family with the child being placed, and will do this in a manner appropriate to their age and understanding. In some occasions, the child may visit your home before the placement.

If it is not reasonably practicable to prepare the placement plan before making the placement, the placement plan must be prepared within five working days of the start of the placement.

*The Children Act 1989; Guidance and Regulation;  
Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review, March 2011. Regulation 9(2)*

During the placement planning meeting, there will be discussion of how long the placement is expected to last and whether support will be necessary to meet the needs of additional children/young people.

It will take into consideration wishes and feelings of those involved and will also provide you with the relevant delegated authority to allow for flexibility of decision making while caring for the child.

The PPM is an opportunity for foster carers to explain the everyday household rules and expectations to the child before the placement is made.

The PPM will also:

- ❑ Provide you with all the relevant information relating to the child, to assist you with successfully looking after them. This refers to information with regards to health, education, day to day routines, likes and dislikes
- ❑ Clarify the practical day-to-day arrangements, such as contact, transport to school, clothing or equipment needed, and any financial issues
- ❑ Clarify who will be responsible for the above actions/arrangements.

Prior to any placement, the child's social worker completes a risk assessment on each child in the household. If behaviour concerns are identified the social worker will also complete a **behaviour management plan**. This plan aims to outline ways on how foster carers can manage certain types of behaviour.





*Also see: Promoting positive behaviour*

Fostering handbook; section 4: Meeting the needs of the children

The placement plan agreement must contain:

- ❑ How the child will be cared for on a day-to-day basis, and how the child's welfare will be safeguarded and promoted by the appropriate person
- ❑ The arrangements for contact between the child and the child's family, or person with parental responsibility
- ❑ The arrangements made for visiting the child, including the frequency of the visits and the arrangements made for advice, support and assistance between visits
- ❑ The arrangements made for the child's health care (including physical, emotional and mental) and dental care
- ❑ The arrangements made for the child's education and training
- ❑ The arrangements made for independent visitors to meet with the child
- ❑ Circumstances in which the placement may be terminated and the child removed from the appropriate person's care, in accordance with regulation 14.

## Placement Information Record (PIR)

This form contains all relevant information about the child and is completed by the placing social worker on the day the child becomes looked after. The form also contains information of decisions about tasks, activities and responsibilities that will be transferred to the child's carer, such as out of school activities or school trips. When the child is accommodated under section 20, the person with parental responsibility will sign the form giving their consent.

Although parent's signature is not required for children looked after under a care order, the child's social worker has the responsibility to seek parental consent to medical treatments.

Ask for a copy of the PIR form on the day the child is placed with you. This form will provide you with details about consent.

Also ask for a copy of the placement agreement.

## Welcoming a child into your home

Children are welcomed into the foster home and feel part of the family. They are not treated differently to the foster carers' own children living in the household. The child's needs are met and they benefit from a stable placement.

*Fostering services' NMS: 11*

It is considered good practice<sup>2</sup> that, with the exception of emergency placements, the child's social worker gives relevant information about the foster home to the child. As part of the welcoming process, foster children may visit you, your home and your family before a final decision on their placement is made.

It is important that you welcome and respect all items the children bring with them, such as clothes, books, photographs or toys, even though they may seem not very valuables to you. These possessions are likely to be the child's link to their birth family and will be important to them. It may also be important to the child that these possessions move on with them in the future.

Children are given free access to the household facilities as would be consistent with reasonable arrangements in a family home. Foster carers explain everyday household rules and expectations to children.

*Fostering services' NMS: 11.4*



*Also see: Matching process and placement team*  
This section of the handbook

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<sup>2</sup> National Minimum Standard 11.3

## Equipment

We ensure that foster carers are fully equipped to fulfil their role. During your fostering assessment, the assessing social worker will have looked at the room identified for fostering and the furniture that you'll provide, and will have discussed what else you will need to meet the needs of a foster child.

Following your approval, the fostering service will provide all the equipment deemed necessary.

Before purchasing any equipment, always ensure you have the consent from the fostering support team manager, otherwise there is no guarantee that you will be reimbursed.

The equipment will come either from existing resources or by authorising purchase of a new item. This equipment **will remain** property of North Somerset Council and may be reclaimed for use by other carers when necessary. **Please ensure that you keep the instructions so that they can be forwarded to other carers in the future.**

### Equipment provided by us (if necessary):

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bed  | <input type="checkbox"/> CO2 detector                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mattress   | <input type="checkbox"/> Fire blanket                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waterproof mattress cover                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> First aid box                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bedding, as required   | <input type="checkbox"/> Pram                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cot  | <input type="checkbox"/> Pram bedding                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cot mattress   | <input type="checkbox"/> Pushchair, rain cover and sunshade |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cot bedding, as required                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Bottles and steriliser             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bedroom furniture: wardrobe, chest of drawers, bedside cabinet | <input type="checkbox"/> High chair                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Small filing cabinet/lockable file                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Stair gates                        |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Baby chair                         |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Car seat/booster seat              |

We will consider financial support for equipment or changes in your home that are paramount to meet the needs of specific children placed with you. **This must be discussed this with the supervising social worker, the child's social worker or their managers.**

The childcare social work team should ensure the child has all personal items or equipment needed, such as aids or adaptations. These items will then belong to the child and should normally move with them.

Remember to contact your supervising social worker if you require financial support for equipment.

We would like all children looked after to have access to a computer. In the event that you do not have a computer within the household that is accessible for a child in your care, we will seek funding to provide you with a computer for fostering use.

Talk to your SSW if you need a computer for a child you're looking after.