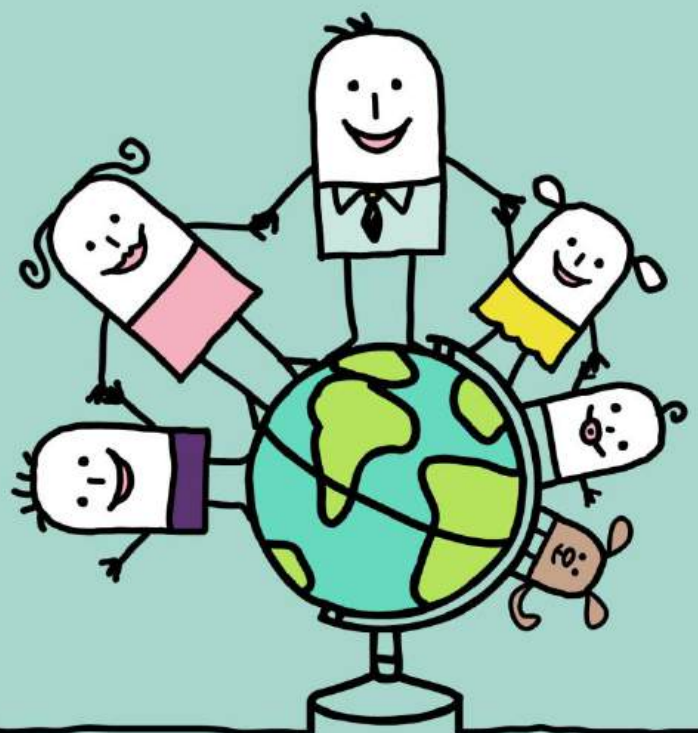


NORTH SOMERSET FOSTER CARER HANDBOOK



Purpose of the Foster Carer Handbook

The Foster Carer Handbook is intended to be a reference guide for both new and existing foster carers. The handbook provides up to date information and guidance to all our foster carers on fostering matters. In addition, it will also provide additional sources of information for practical help in identifying standards of care that are expected from foster carers and in return what you can expect from the North Somerset Fostering Team. New policies and guidance are updated in line with good practice, national regulations and national standards. The Fostering Handbook has links to the Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and references to the relevant Training, Support and Development Standards. You should also use the handbook to support your learning and development throughout your journey as a foster carer.

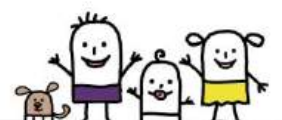
In North Somerset, we are committed to providing the best possible service to our children we look after, by supporting them to live in foster families. Our vision is for children to be safe, healthy, happy, and ambitious for their future and to develop skills for life. We want them to grow up in loving families and caring communities.

Foster carers play an important role in the lives of Children Looked After and their families, so it is important that you have the necessary tools to support you with this task. The handbook is one of these tools alongside the many professionals you will work with including your Supervising Social Worker and other foster carers.

We welcome any feedback to the Fostering Handbook, this can be given to the Supervising Social Worker or the Fostering Team Manager. This is the start of a great journey for you and the children and young people you may work with.

Our Vision for Fostering

- To recognise that all children are unique individuals and to offer personalised support/care that is delivered locally wherever possible.
- To provide information about the services that North Somerset Fostering Team deliver and promote informed choices wherever possible.
- To develop and evolve services in response to identified needs.
- To promote a positive culture in which people feel valued and respected, and are able to challenge, share new ideas and to think innovatively.
- To be confident, behave with integrity, be accountable, encourage candour and promote a sustained learning culture that ensures past poor outcomes are not repeated.
- To have a professional and highly skilled workforce that is effectively trained and supported. This will ensure that staff and foster carers are clear about their role and are working to clear objectives.



- To help children to reach their potential by matching them with the most suitable fostering families. This will be supported by an evidence-based approach to assessments that objectively demonstrates that we are making a difference by measuring the impact of our fostering work.
- To work effectively in partnership with foster carers, children, their families and other professionals. To pay close attention to all views and use them to inform and influence service development.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of North Somerset Council's Fostering Service is to provide quality and safe care within a family setting for children and young people who are unable to live with their own families. The service objectives are to provide a skilled and flexible fostering service which can meet the wide range of assessed needs of children and young people which include:

- Short breaks, short and long-term care arrangements
- Short breaks specifically for children with disabilities
- A staying put scheme for young people when they reach 18 years of age
- Weekenders care – foster carers who support children throughout their childhood and beyond by caring for them one weekend a month and additional times according to their needs
- Out of hours emergency carers.

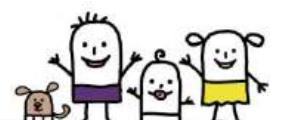
Fostering Services Role

The Fostering Services role is to provide stability, and first-rate foster care for children who are valued, supported and encouraged to develop as individuals. To achieve this aim, we recruit, train and approve foster carers and provide supervision and support.

The Assessment Process

The assessment process usually takes 16 weeks from application to approval; there are of course occasions where this may take longer or can be completed sooner dependent on individual circumstances. We aim to provide the best possible support during the assessment process, we offer preparation training to any potential carers and ensure that they are allocated an assessing social worker as soon as their application is received.

Once an enquiry is received, we ensure that we contact the enquirer as soon as possible to arrange an initial home visit, this is undertaken by our marketing and recruitment officer or a recruitment social worker. An application form is supplied if the visit is positive and we strive to support the application form to be completed within a couple of weeks. Once the application is received, we are able to complete relevant checks such as a DBS check (Disclosure and Barring Service) and health check. Applicants will be asked to nominate three



referees per household who we will interview at some point during the assessment process. Once the assessment is complete it will be presented to our fostering panel who will make a recommendation regarding applicants' suitability to foster. The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) will then decide whether to approve as foster carers.

The Foster Carers' Role

Foster carers are at the heart of the Fostering Service. They are assessed, trained and supported to look after children and young people in a family environment. This provides children and young people with stability, quality care and an opportunity to grow and develop and to reach their full potential.

Children's Services Role

North Somerset Children's Services recognise the positive and central role that foster carers play in the lives of the children placed with them. In order to ensure the best possible outcomes for children, all members of North Somerset's Children's Services are committed to working in partnership with foster carers to ensure that the child residing with them can live as normal a family life as possible. Our working relationships are based on mutual trust and respect.

What foster carers can expect from fostering service:

Working In Partnership

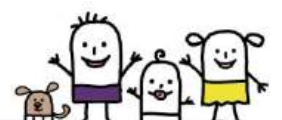
We will:

- Work in partnership with foster carers, recognising that foster carers have the skills and expertise to make the biggest difference to the everyday lives of children in care.
- Value your skills and expertise and recognise that you know the children best.
- Include you in all meetings which affect the child you care for.
- Ensure that this service meets fostering regulations and standards and North Somerset Councils Statement of Purpose.
- Treat you fairly without discrimination and respect your confidentiality.

Providing Information

We will:

- Endeavor to give you all information available in writing prior to any children living with you and will ensure that a Placement Plan is completed with you and is agreed in advance of the move wherever possible.
- Ensure that all information is regularly updated so that you are best placed to care for the child living with you. This will include information from the team around the child.
- Value the information that foster carers contribute.
- Provide you with the fees and allowances policy for foster carers.



- Provide you with a regular newsletter which will provide any relevant updates.

Clarity About Decisions

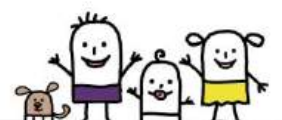
We will:

- Recognise that in order for children to live a full family life, foster carers must be enabled to make every day decisions using delegated authority. This will allow children living with you to feel part of your family and to not feel different from their friends, whilst having regard for the wishes of parents and the courts.
- Clarify which decisions you can make from the start of the child living with you, at the child's Placement Planning meeting and at the child's looked after reviews.
- Ensure that everyone in North Somerset Children's Services understands the implications of delegated authority and will give timely and detailed information about decision making which allows you to act as an advocate in all aspects of the child's development.
- Also ensure that policy and practice does not place artificial barriers in the way of promoting a normal family, school and social life for the children placed with you.

Support

We will:

- Recognise that fostering can be an isolating and challenging task which can affect all aspects of family and social life. Appropriate and timely support makes all the difference to the whole fostering family and to the child in your care.
- Respond positively to requests for additional support and consider your needs in a timely and empathetic fashion.
- Provide you with regular supervision and frequent telephone contact which meets your needs and those of the children you foster.
- Commit to formally review your practice on at least an annual basis which will give you the opportunity to comment on your fostering experience.
- Provide you with systems that allow you to share electronic information and documents securely ensuring that data and confidentiality are protected.
- Give you honest and open feedback which allows you to reflect on your practice and develop your skills further.
- Provide you with access to out of hours telephone support for emergencies.
- Provide specialist support to inform the care that you provide in areas such as education, health, youth offending and managing challenges.
- Pay your fostering allowances and foster carer expenses in a timely manner.
- Provide a range of support groups for foster carers to attend including a specific support group for kinship carers where you and your family can find support and share experiences with other fostering families.



- Provide you with access to trained foster carers who act as mentors and who can support you with issues relating to fostering.
- Provide you with annual membership to The Fostering Network.
- Provide you with access to our Employee Assistance Programme.
- We will have regular coffee mornings periodically to bring foster carers together to discuss topics of interest and support.

Learning And Development

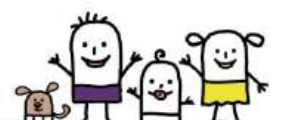
We will:

- Ensure that foster carers are enabled to access learning and development opportunities throughout their fostering career. This will ensure that you have the skills and knowledge you need and will enable you to develop your practice in order that you can help transform the lives of the children you foster.
- Provide you and your family with appropriate and relevant training by course trainers who understand the fostering task. We will encourage trainers to allow you opportunities for self- reflection so that you are able to apply learning to your practice.
- Provide you with other developmental opportunities which make the best use of your skills and expertise such as mentoring or providing training or support to other foster carers.
- Ensure all foster carers have an annual, mutually agreed skills development plan reflecting their knowledge, the needs of the child they are caring for and their fostering aspirations. This will be for you to complete with your supervising social worker.
- Support foster carers to develop meaningful relationships with the children in their care and the other members of the team around the child.
- Recognise and value the knowledge and experience that foster carers bring as part of the team around the child.

Fair Treatment

We will:

- Consult with foster carers where possible before changing terms, conditions and policies affecting fostering.
- Provide an independent advice and mediation service which you can access without recourse to the fostering service.
- Ensure openness in all of our discussions and communications with you.
- Ensure that you are treated with respect, are kept informed and provided with independent advice if you are subject to an allegation.
- Provide a framework for dealing with allegations and adhere to our agreed timescales where possible.



- Ensure that you know the arrangements for the payment of fees and allowances in the event that you are not able to foster while the subject of an allegation.

What the fostering service and children's service can expect from foster carers:

Working In Partnership

We expect foster carers to:

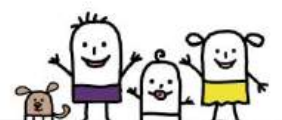
- Demonstrate a high standard of care and conduct.
- Maintain open and honest dialogue with the Fostering Service and Children's Services.
- Aim to build meaningful and collaborative relationships with the supervising social worker, the child's social worker and others within the team around child.
- Demonstrate their expertise and make use of their skills to the best of their ability.
- Provide children with a good experience of family life, attend meetings about the children and young people we care for and work closely with education and health providers.
- Be willing to work with parents and people who are important to a child.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Meet the standards set out in the fostering regulations and National Minimum Standards [Fostering Guidance - MASTER](#).
- Maintain an open dialogue with the fostering service.
- Inform their supervising social worker about factors that impact on their fostering including changes in their household and any difficulties that arise for them.

Respect for the Child

Every child and young person should be respected as an individual and supported to achieve their aspirations and reach their full potential. We recognise that the experiences of each child and young person will have had a significant influence on their perception of what family life is and they manifest this with the behaviours they display.

We expect foster carers to:

- Develop a meaningful relationship with the child, understand their needs, support their growth, and become an advocate and champion for them.
- Listen to the child placed with them and take their opinions into account including advocating for the child if needed.
- Provide children with an experience of a secure, positive family life that meets their needs.



- Respect and promote every aspect of a child's religious, linguistic and cultural heritage and offer the same level of care and protection as we would want for our own children.
- Give the children we care for, the best opportunities and support them to make decisions regarding their own lives, as appropriate to their age, understanding and ability.
- Attend meetings with the professional network around the child including health and education and other relevant agencies and provide reports about the children and young people you care for.
- Work with the agencies involved with the child to promote their overall needs.
- Work in an open and transparent way.
- Use language that cares.
- Wherever possible take fostered children on family holidays.

Information

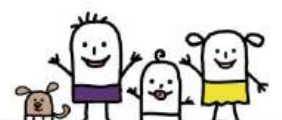
We expect foster carers to:

- Inform their supervising social worker about any changes in their household as any changes may impact fostering.
- Inform their supervising social worker about any difficulties that arise for them.
- Take part in regular supervision and an annual review of their fostering practice.
- Communicate regularly with the child's social worker to keep them fully informed of any developments in the child's life.
- Attend meetings and provide reports as requested in order to ensure the best possible outcomes for the child.
- Commit to keeping and sharing records with the Local Authority.
- Continue to save memories and undertake life story work, recognising the role you play in the child's personal identity and life journey not only now but for the future.

Learning, Development and Support

We expect foster carers to:

- Access learning and development opportunities throughout their fostering career. This will ensure they have the skills and knowledge they need and allow them to develop their practice in order that we can help transform the lives of the children they foster.
- Reflect on their fostering practice in order to improve the quality of care provided for the children and young people who live with them.
- Contribute to the ongoing development of the fostering service.
- Actively contribute to their skills development plan which reflects their knowledge, the needs of the child in our care and their fostering aspirations.



- Continually develop their skills and understanding by attending relevant training and engaging in creative learning.
- Take up relevant training and development opportunities offered to them and inform the fostering service if they are unable to attend meetings or training as soon as reasonably possible.
- Attend and contribute to support groups, coffee mornings and events.
- Contribute to the training and mentoring of other foster carers where appropriate.

Communication And Consultation

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good working relationship.

We expect foster carers to:

- Respond to surveys, consultations and discussions in order to inform the development of the service.
- Ensure that you communicate with the team around the child in a professional, sensitive and appropriate manner in line with the Department of Education, Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011 and the Department of Education Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers Guidance.
- Communicate all concerns and significant events that impact the child looked after to the fostering service and child's social worker in a timely manner.

Children's Pledge

We have made a pledge at North Somerset Council, to our children and young people so that they can know what they can expect from us, in terms of keeping them safe, happy and healthy.

We will help and support you to be as healthy as possible, by:

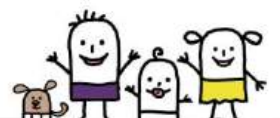
- Making sure you visit the doctor and dentist.
- Helping you exercise and eat healthy food.
- Helping you if you are poorly.

We will support you to do the best you can and enjoy life, by:

- Helping you to go to school, see your friends and do hobbies and activities.
- Helping you to attend and do your very best at school.
- Helping you learn new skills and try new things.
- Celebrating when you do well.

We will support you to get your voice heard, by:

- Asking how you feel about things.
- Listening to you when we make plans.
- Having a Children in Care Council to help you have your say about the things that are important to you.



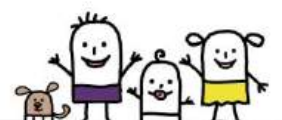
- Making sure there is someone for you to talk to about any problems or worries you have.
- Helping you to take part in your review

We will help you to be as safe as possible, by:

- Making sure your social worker visits you.
- Making sure you are happy where you live.
- Helping you stay out of trouble and danger.
- Making sure you are treated fairly.
- Making sure you know your social worker well.
- Making sure you see your social worker on your own on a regular basis.
- Making sure you keep your social worker for as long as possible.
- Making sure you know how to contact your social worker if you need to.
- Working hard to make sure you feel safe and happy where you live, and that you are treated fairly.
- Working with you to create a plan if things go wrong or you become unsafe.
- Making sure it is simple and easy for you to make a complaint, compliment or comment. Making sure you have someone independent to talk to about any problems or issues you may have (to include an explanation about advocates).
- Supporting you to keep in touch with your family.

North Somerset Council's Pledge for Care Leavers

- We will support you to achieve your goals and enjoy life, by supporting you to carry on with your everyday life as much as possible. This can mean going to school/college/work or training, seeing your friends and doing your hobbies and activities. Helping you to attend and do your very best in your training, education or employment. We will work hard to make sure you have extra support if you need it. Supporting you to take part in new hobbies and activities to help you learn new skills and enjoy new experiences.
- We will support you to get your voice heard and involve you in decisions about your life, by always making sure your views, wishes and feelings are included when we are planning anything about your life or your future. Talking to you about decisions that have been made and helping you understand what they mean for you. Having a forum for young people who are leaving care to help have your say about the issues that are important to you and to help us improve our service and making sure we are doing the very best we can for young people.
- Making sure it is simple and easy for you to make a complaint, compliment or comment.
- Making it easy for you to access an independent advocate to talk to about any problems or issues you may have.
- Making it easy for you to attend and take part in your pathway planning.



- We will support you to understand your journey and remember your history; by answering any questions you might have about your time in care and what happens next. Talking to you about the best and safest ways to stay in touch with your family and helping you learn about and understand your family history and life story.
- We will support you to get ready for your future; by making sure we learn about your wishes and aspirations for your future and leaving care.
- Helping you to learn the skills you need to be confident and independent, such as cooking, cleaning and managing money.
- Making sure you are aware of all of the options, rights and entitlements available to you as a Care Leaver.
- We will support you to achieve your goals and enjoy life, by supporting you to carry on with your everyday life as much as possible, like going to school, college, work, training or seeing your friends and doing your hobbies and activities.
- Having a forum for young people who are leaving care to help have your say about the issues that are important to you and to help us improve our service and making sure we are doing the very best we can for young people.

National Legislative and Policy framework

North Somerset Council's Fostering Service is underpinned by the national legislative and policy framework and principles outlined in the following policy.

Children Act 1989

The Children Act 1989 is the primary legislation governing work with children and their families. The key principles of the Act can be summarised as follows:

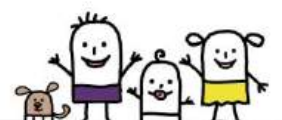
The Welfare Principle: Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, including protecting the child from harm or abuse. The child's welfare should be the 'paramount' consideration of anybody dealing with a child.

Partnership Working: it is expected that all professionals supporting and working on behalf of children and young people should work in partnership with families.

This includes foster carers. Compulsory powers should only be used when this is better for the child than working with the family on a voluntary basis. Promoting and maintaining contact between children and their families should be a priority wherever possible.

The importance of the child's family is highlighted, and the expectation is that, whenever possible, children and young people should be brought up in their own immediate or extended families.

Child and Parents Wishes: We always want to seek out the wishes of the child and/or their parents and take them into account when making decisions about the child's future.



The importance of considering key aspects of the child's background is highlighted the child's religious persuasion, racial origin, cultural and linguistic background, and a child's particular needs as a result of any disability, must be taken into account in planning for the child.

Parental Responsibility: This is defined in the Children Act 1989 as all the rights, duties, powers, responsibility and authority a parent has for a child or young person and their property.

As children grow older, they assume greater responsibility for themselves. Parents never lose their responsibility for their child, even when they share it with the local authority when the child is subject to a Care Order. The only exception is that when a child is adopted the new adoptive parents obtain parental responsibility for the child and the birth parents lose it.

[Fostering Services \(England\) Regulations 2011](#): Regulate all fostering services, replacing the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

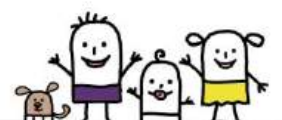
Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2013 (Amendments to the Children Act 1989)

This is a statutory instrument that bears similar weight to an Act of Parliament and must be complied with by all parties involved in foster care arrangements. The Children's Act 1989 sets out the principles that underpin fostering practices such as 'The welfare of the child is paramount', 'The Wishes, feelings and Views of the Child are to be obtained' as those of parents, and guardians of a child.

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (2011): These describes the minimum standards that the government requires of organisations delivering services. These are used by inspectors to assess the quality of the service and determine the level of compliance of anybody involved in foster care. Each standard also has expected outcomes which have to be achieved by the fostering service.

Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4 Fostering Services (2011): Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011) contains the requirements set out by government to support local authorities, working with fostering service providers, in giving the best possible care and support to children in foster care. Replaces the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: Family Placements (1991).

Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010: The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review guidance and regulations came into force in April 2011. This guidance entails all aspects of care planning for children and young people and covers the following areas Care Planning, Placement, Case Review, ceasing to look after a child, Short Breaks, Case Records and Application of the 2010 regulation to children who are in contact with youth justice services.



Care Planning and Fostering Regulations (Amendments) 2015: guidance and regulations which introduced a consistent definition of long-term foster care placements across England, and in setting out the key steps and commitments involved for all parties. The changes rightly strengthen the importance of foster care as a permanence option for children and young people in care.

Understanding Why Children Become Looked After

Children and young people may need to be cared for a variety of reasons, and each individual child or young person will have a care plan drawn to take into account their own unique needs, type of support as well as future planning. A foster carer may be caring for a child with a plan to return home, moving to live with a family member under a kinship fostering arrangement, moving towards independence, adoption, special guardianship, or long-term foster care.

As foster carers you will hear references that a child or young person has come into the care of the local authority as they have suffered from physical, emotional, sexual abuse or from neglect. Below are some definitions of the different types of abuse, you will talk about these during your preparation training.

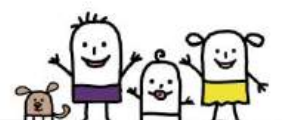
As a local authority we do not always know what the child or young person has experienced in the past, so it is important that you are aware of possible indicators and you alert the social worker of the child or young person if you see evidence of them. It is important to record these in your foster carer records; however insignificant they may appear it can help to piece together the whole picture. These are some of the experiences that some of our children may have lived through. Other forms of harms can also be experienced in by our children.

Physical abuse

Happens when parents or adults deliberately inflict injuries on a child, or do not protect the child from injury.

Possible indicators of physical abuse are:

- Unexplained injuries bruises, scars, bites or burns, particularly if they are recurrent injuries of varying ages and types or in unusual places
- Child shows fear about returning home
- Child covering certain areas of their body i.e. oversized clothing
- Discomfort in a particular area of their body especially when undertaking an activity
- Withdrawal from physical contact
- Bruising or non-accidental injuries on very young babies (Please note that bruising can have difference appearance on different skin hues)



Neglect

Happens when a parent or carer fails to meet a child's essential needs for food, clothing, shelter or medical care, or when children are left without proper supervision that leaves them unsafe or unprotected.

Possible indicators of neglect are:

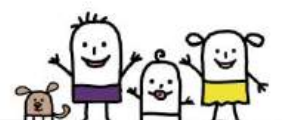
- Consistently unkempt, dirty appearance
- Missing their educational needs
- Medical needs of child unmet
- Delay in the child's development without other clear cause
- Lack of responsiveness with peers or adults in everyday social situations
- Behaviour such as head banging or rocking
- Repeated failure by parents/carers to prevent injury
- Consistently inappropriately clothed for the weather
- Hazardous living conditions
- Failure to attend any sort of appointments
- Non-organic failure to thrive

Sexual abuse

This form of abuse occurs when an adult or older child involves a child in sexual activity to which the child does not or cannot consent because of their age or understanding.

Possible indicators of sexual abuse are:

- Withdrawn, fearful or aggressive behaviour to other children or adults
- Poor concentration at school or learning problems which do not match intellectual ability
- Behaviour with sexual overtones inappropriate to age
- Complaints of genital itching or pain
- Unexplained abdominal pain
- Distrust of a familiar adult or anxiety about being left with a particular person
- Unexplained gifts or money
- Apparent secrecy
- Wetting day or night when previously dry and clean
- Severe sleep disturbances or nightmares
- Chronic illness, especially throat infections
- Venereal disease or other sexually transmitted diseases
- Marked reluctance to take part in physical activity or to change clothes for PE etc.
- Phobias or panic attacks
- Self-mutilation or attempted suicide
- Running away from home



Exploitation and Contextual Safeguarding

Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse that affects children and young people every year in the UK. It can happen to any young person whatever their background, gender and age.

Many victims of Child Sexual Exploitation have been groomed by an abusing adult who may befriend them and make them feel special in some way through inducements like gifts and attention. Victims may be targeted in person and/or online.

Possible indicators of exploitation are:

- Going missing for periods of time or regularly returning home late
- Regularly missing school or not taking part in education
- Appearing with unexplained gifts or new possessions
- Associating with other young people involved in exploitation
- Talking about extreme views
- Having older boyfriends and girlfriends
- Suffering from sexually transmitted infections
- Mood swings or changes in emotional wellbeing
- Drug and alcohol misuse
- Displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour

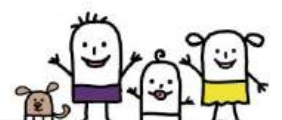
Emotional abuse

Occurs when parents or carers do not pay sufficient attention to the emotional wellbeing of children or young adults in their care. Symptoms of this appear in the form of threats, taunting or belittling causing them to become nervous, withdrawn, aggressive, or display abnormal behavioural traits.

Possible indicators of emotional abuse are:

- Very low self-esteem
- Lack of any sense of fun
- Excessively clingy or attention seeking behaviour
- Over reactions to mistakes or over anxious to please
- Substantial failure to reach potential in learning
- Self-harming
- Compulsive rituals
- Unusual patterns of response to others showing emotion

North Somerset Council have online training available to its foster carers on all of the above forms of abuse as well as other forms of harm that can occur to some of our Children Looked After.



The indicators on the lists above are just a guideline, there can be additional indicators or on occasions no indicators. Further information can be found by clicking the link below.

[North Somerset Safeguarding | North Somerset Council](#)

The Team Around a Child Looked After

A child looked after will have involvement with many services from the point of coming into care, being looked after, after returning home, or being given permanency with an alternative carer, and subsequently becoming independent. Below are some of the teams you may hear of and some roles that you may hear mentioned frequently.

Adoption Teams

Help to find permanent families for children and ensure children moving from foster care to adoption have a smooth transition.

Kinship

Generally undertake the assessments of family members or friends of looked after children, they offer support and guidance too.

CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service)

They support children with their emotional wellbeing and mental health needs.

Care Leavers Service

They help and support to ensure that young people reaching the age of 18 have a smooth transition into adulthood as they leave care.

Fostering Marketing and Recruitment Officer

They recruit new foster carers to North Somerset.

Foster Carers

They look after the children who cannot remain in the care of their parents or family.

Child Social Workers

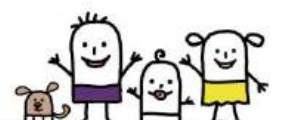
Family Safeguarding Service, Children Looked after Service, Assessment and Referral. They are here to look after the needs of the child and do that by working closely with all members of the team.

Quality Assurance

They ensure that all parts of Children's Services operate effectively, using audits and other tools to monitor performance.

Virtual School

They support everyone in the team to help all children looked after and care leavers with their educational needs to enable them to reach their full potential. They work with all schools and settings that North Somerset foster children attend.



Supervising Social Workers and Children's Practitioners

They support foster carers and make sure they have what they need to care for children in their homes, and that everyone is safe.

Care Plans for Children

Care Plans

Care Plans are made when a child first becomes 'Looked after' and cover attributes such as:

- Where a child will be residing, who the primary carer will be, and the type of fostering arrangement
- The child or young person's access to education including what educational establishment they will attend
- The child or young person's health and wellbeing including the identification of the individuals who would take responsibility for the doctor and hospital appointments
- How the child or young person's needs around ethnicity, religion and culture will be respected
- How often a child or young person will see their family and persons important to them.

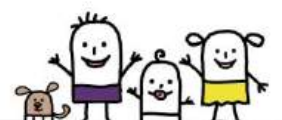
The children's social worker will collaborate with the child to ensure their involvement in writing these plans including how they feel. Plans will be updated regularly at review meetings where it is important that children and young people attend so that their opinions are listened to and considered. Other plans may include a permanency plan, health plan, personal education plan, keeping safe plan or pathway plan all of these will be supported by social workers.

Skills Levels:

The fostering service approves foster carers to look after children aged 0-18 years. Many of the children in foster care have experienced difficulties including abuse or neglect before being fostered. Some children and young people present with very challenging behaviour, special needs or complex health conditions.

North Somerset operates a fostering scheme which incorporates all approved foster carers regardless of whether these are mainstream or kinship carers, they are all treated the same. All carers are financially supported via weekly child age related allowance payments and an additional skills payment. The current scheme has three levels linked to the carers skills, weekly fees are paid to carers according to their skills level.

The three levels are foundation, intermediate and advanced. In addition to these there is a specialist payment level which is predominately based on the needs of the child, for example a child moving from a residential setting to a foster home would warrant a specialist payment.



This would be reviewed on a regular basis and may not be paid if the child's needs no longer warrant this.

Every carer will have a skills development plan which will be used to record the carers skills and training completed. There is a space for reflections and carers will be asked to contribute to this by their supervising social worker.

A copy of the training policy and skills development plans can be found on our website:

[Fostering North Somerset](#)

The training policy also sets out requirements for moving up through the skills levels this includes training and development expectations and support group attendance requirements at each level. Each level completed will add to a carers skills and competencies with advanced carers being the most experienced and skilled carers. Advanced carers would be expected to care for children with complex needs as they have demonstrated that they have the ability to do so by being at advanced level.

Different Types of Fostering Arrangements:

Children Looked After may be placed with our approved foster carers under these five main arrangements: Short term, long term, short breaks, kinship, emergency, weekenders and parent and child arrangement.

Short term

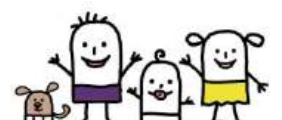
Some carers look after children short term. These are carers who will take children and young people and look after them until it is clear what their longer-term plans are. This could involve children moving to adoption or a permanent foster family, for the child to return to their own family or a move towards independent accommodation. It is difficult to define how long short term is as it will depend on individual circumstances and the care plan. It can be for a few weeks or could be for over a year.

Long Term

This is a child remaining with foster carers who are prepared to make a commitment to them until they reach adulthood.

If you are caring for a child for whom the care plan is long-term foster care and you feel you could make this commitment, you should discuss this with the child or young person's social worker and also your supervising social worker. Alternatively, you may be caring for a child or young person for whom a long-term home needs to be found. The social worker for the child will work with you to identify a home and make plans to move the child on in a planned and child centred way to long-term foster carers.

There is a clear process to be undertaken when considering a long-term home. This provides time to ensure that the long term needs of the child or young person are well matched with



what the foster carer is able to offer. If through this process it appears to be a good match, then arrangements will be made to consider linking the child or young person with the foster carer(s) during a long term matching meeting. A report will be completed for this meeting by the child's social worker and the supervising social worker, a meeting will take place with all professionals involved and everyone's views heard. The long term matching paperwork can be found on our website: [Fostering North Somerset](#)

Short breaks

These are generally suited to carers who work and are unable to care for a child on a longer-term basis. Short breaks carers usually care for a child over a weekend or during school holidays or whenever they have the time. Short breaks carers can also care for children with disabilities.

Kinship Care

Kinship carers are caring for children that they are familiar with and have a connection with. They are usually part of the child's extended family and have been asked to care for the child because their parents are struggling for various reasons.

Emergency Care

Emergency care is for a very short period of time and can sometimes be out of office hours for example in the evenings and weekends where they will be approached to care for a child by the emergency duty team. Generally, the carers will be asked to care for the child for 72 hours or until a more suitable home can be found.

Weekenders

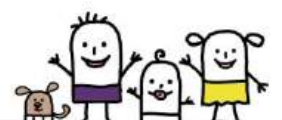
Weekenders care is suitable for carers who cannot commit to a child on a full time basis, this is similar to a short breaks carer but a weekender carer is matched to a child and will spend at least once a month caring for them and will be part of their lives until adulthood and beyond.

Parent and Child

This is a carer who will offer care to a parent and a child in order for them to reside together. Usually, assessments will take place during this arrangement, and the carer will be asked to contribute to this. North Somerset don't yet have any parent and child carers but this is something that is going to be developed soon.

Support for Children Looked After Child Social Worker Visit

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 set out common requirements for the visiting of all children who are looked after by the Local Authority. It is good practice that when a child looked after goes to live with a carer they should be



accompanied by the social worker to the home. Following this, the child's social worker must visit the child in the home at the below intervals, subject to the exceptions. The role of the social worker is to work alongside the foster carer to ensure that the needs of the child looked after are met.

- On the day the child is moved to the foster home
- Within one week of the start of any new home move
- Intervals of not more than six weeks during the first year of the foster home
- Thereafter, at intervals of not more than six weeks (or 3 months if the home is intended to last until the child is 18).
- In addition, the Care Planning and Fostering (miscellaneous amendments) (England) Regulations 2015 state in regulation 28 (3A):

Where a child is in a designated long-term foster placement and has been in that placement for at least one year, and the child should be of sufficient age and understanding and has agreed to be visited less frequently than required by paragraph (2)(c) visits after the first year may take place at intervals of not more than six months. Any decision to extend the frequency of visits as previously outlined must be agreed by the IRO at a Child looked after Review.

These are only the minimum requirements, and the Looked after Review may recommend more frequent visits. The frequency of visits should always be determined by the circumstances of the case and visits should be made whenever reasonably requested by the child or foster carers regardless of the status.

In addition, the child's social worker should visit:

- Whenever reasonably requested to do so by the child
- As soon as a complaint is received from the child or from another person relating to the child concerning the standard of care they are receiving or
- If there is any proposal to remove the child from the home where concerns have been raised about his/her welfare.

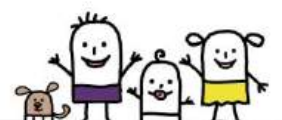
Some visits should be unannounced. Meetings involving a child e.g. Looked After Reviews, do not in themselves constitute a visit, unless time is taken outside of the meeting to talk with and spend time with the child.

The child's social worker should on occasion take the child out from the home (for example for a snack or a visit to a park) as this can strengthen the relationship between the child and the social worker and is also in the interests of child protection in that the child may feel more able to discuss issues that are of concern to them.

Voice of the Child

We all know it is important to keep children and young people at the heart of all we do. The Children Act (amongst other policies and legislations) tell us that children and young people must have their voices heard and views considered when decisions are being made.

When an annual review for a foster carer takes place a child residing there or who may have previously resided there or been on a short break there will be asked for feedback. The Mind



of My Own app is often used by social workers as a way to capture the child's views. These are an integral part of a carers annual review and must be received before the review takes place.

We also hold regular groups for teenagers in care, this is an opportunity for the children to get to know each other, spend time undertaking an activity and to seek support from the workers managing the groups. There are guest speakers at the groups to talk about topics that may be relevant to teenagers. These will take place during the school holidays throughout the year.

Children of Carers

North Somerset fostering service have a support group specifically for children whose family foster. This service offers foster carers own children the opportunity to meet other children and young people who are in a similar family settings. The group runs during school holidays, and all children of carers are invited. Activities such as bowling take place with the ownness being to offer emotional support to children who may want to confide in someone how they are feeling about their family fostering.

Independent Advocacy Service

North Somerset Council offers a free independent advocacy service run by Barnados for children. The Advocacy service is offered to young people who may have been in care or are currently in care. It offers a young person the opportunity:

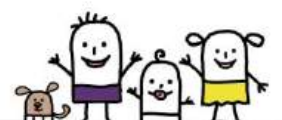
- To have their say
- To talk to someone if they have run away, gone missing and they want to talk to someone, for young people who have a disability, have short breaks or live in a residential unit.
- To support them at Child Looked After Reviews, Personal Educational Meetings, etc.
- To help them understand decisions made about them, their care, and their future.

Please see [Children's advocacy | Barnardo's](#) for more information and speak to your child's social worker.

Support for Our Foster Carers

Allowances and fees

As discussed earlier the amount of money our foster carers are paid depends on their skills level and experience, combined with the age and number of children they are looking after. As a North Somerset Foster Carer, you will receive a weekly allowance plus a weekly fee for each child.



The policy relating to current fees and allowances can be found on our website: [Fostering North Somerset](#)

Allowances and expenses for the child are also paid for a variety of other reasons such as travel, clothing, birthdays, festivals and holidays. Contact your supervising social worker for further details on your progression as well as any allowances that you might be entitled to.

With regards to taxes and national insurance contributions, many foster carers are exempt from paying taxes on some of their fostering allowances and earnings. [Please see the Fostering Network website](#) for the most up to date information about tax for Foster Carers. We ask that you contact HMRC for further details on this and [visit the National Government website on National Insurance Credits](#).

In addition, North Somerset Council recommend that all foster carers have Building and Contents Insurance and ensure that you have comprehensive policies in respect to car insurance and a valid driving licence where applicable. Moreover, you must inform your insurers of your status as a foster carer. We ask that you provide all relevant documents to your supervising social worker annually, this will be included in the review.

Birthdays, Holiday and Festive Payments

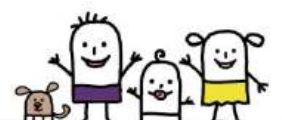
North Somerset Council understands that special occasions for children who are looked after are important and should be celebrated so children feel valued, wanted and have a sense of belonging. Therefore, we pride itself in being able to support carers to provide carers with the support to celebrate special occasions for children who are looked after. We consider festive, holiday and birthday occasions essential and therefore, we will provide payments towards these occasions to ensure that foster carers can make these occasions notable. Please contact your supervising social worker for further details on these amounts and how to claim for these.

Fostering Network

Foster carers here at North Somerset Council have an automatic membership with Fostering Network and have access to a wide range of support and advice. You can access the website here [About Fostering | The Fostering Network](#) The website has a large library of policies and practice information as well as links to legal advice and support during allegations. They also offer independent support and advice in cases of 'allegation', being on hold, deregistration or disagreements you might have with the Council. They also provide support during the Independent Reviewing mechanism.

Supervising Social Worker

All approved foster carers will have an allocated, suitably qualified supervising social worker. The allocated supervising social worker is responsible for supervising and supporting carers, ensuring that they have the necessary guidance, support and direction to maintain a quality service, including safe caring practices. This will include an understanding that they must work



within the National Minimum Standards for Fostering and the agency's policies, procedures and guidance.

The supervising social worker must also ensure that the foster carers' training and development needs are identified, and that newly approved carers work towards completing the Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers Workbook. They also have the responsibility to ensure foster carers are familiar and made aware of new policies and guidance.

The foster carer(s) should be fully aware of the Notification of Significant Events and the need to immediately report to their supervising social worker or Fostering Agency the following:

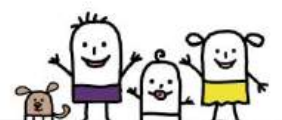
- The death of a child
- A serious illness or accident of a fostered child living with them
- The outbreak at the foster home of any infectious disease (which in the opinion of a general practitioner attending the home is sufficiently serious to be notified)
- An allegation that a fostered child living with foster parents has committed a serious offence
- They have concerns about a fostered child living with them being exploited
- The police visiting the foster carer's home as a result of a serious incident relating to a fostered child living there
- A fostered child living with the foster carer(s) who has gone missing
- Any serious concerns about the emotional or mental health of a child

Supervision Visits

A supervision agreement should be signed during the first supervision session, this sets out the frequency and expectations for the sessions.

Visits should be set up and agreed between the foster carer and the supervising social worker from the time of the foster carer's approval and endorsed by the supervising social worker's line manager. Supervision is essentially a supportive and enabling two-way process for the following:

- Ensure the foster carers understand how they contribute to the local authority's services for children.
- Enable foster carers to contribute effectively to the plans for the children for whom they are caring.
- Provide appropriate monitoring and feedback on the foster carers' work to ensure National Minimum Standards for Foster Carers are fully met.
- Support carers to complete skills development plans for each carer, which are linked to their training and their annual review.
- Support foster carers by providing advice or making this available from elsewhere as appropriate.



- Give foster carers an opportunity to raise any problems and make sure they are addressed appropriately.
- Acknowledge the challenges and demands that the fostering tasks can have on foster families and ensure appropriate support is available.
- Recognise and address any difficulties the foster carers' own children may be experiencing arising from fostering.
- Assist foster carers to work in an inclusive way that respects and promotes individual cultures and differences.

The agenda for each meeting should cover:

- Matters arising from the last supervision.
- Personal issues, e.g. effect of fostering on the foster carer's own family, changes in the carer's situation and circumstances etc.
- Training needs or requirements.
- Reflections of events or situations involving the fostered child.

Fostered Child/ren:

- Their health, cultural, educational, leisure and family time needs - and any support needs.
- Any accidents, injuries and illnesses experienced by each child.
- Any concerns in relation to children they are caring for.
- Any other significant events.
- Any medication, medical treatment or first aid administered.
- Safe caring and health and safety issues

Training

North Somerset's fostering service training schedule contains a wide spectrum of learning opportunities that have been developed from the feedback and suggestions from our carers whilst ensuring that is also relevant to the needs of the children and young people that we care for.

In line with our service vision 'to have a professional and highly skilled workforce that is effectively trained and supported', it is very important to us that everyone involved in our service has available to them the appropriate level of training, support and the opportunity to be involved so that they feel valued, respected and equipped with the skills and expertise to help our children and young people achieve their potential.

Development opportunities are available through a range of blended learning approaches, including face to face courses, virtual and e-learning. We review our programme annually and each year offer a number of new specialised courses from our training staff and experts in their field.



Foster Carers may apply for any training course within the programme that they feel would enable them to further develop their skills and knowledge. We also offer a range of supplementary courses that help you to develop your expertise in fostering and to meet a wider range of needs.

The core training courses offered are a combination of face to face and virtual sessions. Where appropriate and agreed by their supervising social worker, carers could consider accessing these courses through online portals.

Please ask your supervising social worker or our training co-ordinator for full details of the courses. If you undertake relevant training in an employment or voluntary position, please discuss this with your supervising social worker too as this may be included if valid certificates are provided.

Safer Caring Plan and Risk Assessments

The key emphasis within all the fostering legislation and the Children Act is that the welfare of the children is paramount and that they should feel safe. This is important for all family members, not just those children and young people who are looked after. Safer caring is about good practice and when you were being assessed as a foster carer you should have completed a safer caring family plan. This is a plan which you and your family agree as the 'rules' for your household. It will include day to day things and hopefully will keep your family safe.

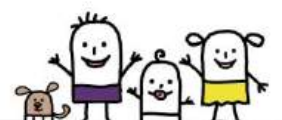
Your safer care family plan should consider many areas including respecting each other's bedrooms, dressing appropriately, car travel, taking photographs and social media. Your safer care family plan should be considered every time you have a new child joining the home where you may need to consider their particular needs. Ideally this should be completed at the Placement Planning Meeting and regularly reviewed in collaboration with your Supervising Social Worker (SSW).

Sometimes it may be necessary to complete risk assessments. This is a process to ensure that all risks have been considered, and a decision is made based on full information. It is not meant to be a process to stop children and young people from doing things but just a way of making the right decision for them. In some situations, risk assessments must always be undertaken, for example, children and young people sharing a bedroom (usually in kinship arrangements or when carers are taking children on holiday).

Foster Carer Support Groups: Connecting with Carers

It is recognised by the fostering service that foster carers find support groups to be the most helpful means of support. Support groups are held regularly and foster carers are encouraged to attend these where possible.

There are often invited speakers to support groups, so this provides carers with important information and structured support time as well as the more informal aspects of the groups.



Foster carers are also encouraged to talk to other foster carers. This can happen naturally through pre-existing relationships or relationships that grow from carers meeting at support groups or training courses. However, supervising social workers can also link new foster carers up with more experienced carers as an additional support which can be very helpful as foster carers start their fostering career.

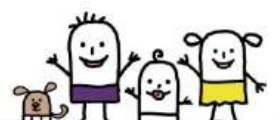
Our support groups are:

- Solo carers
- Men who foster
- Caring for teenagers
- Supporting children with special educational needs or disabilities
- Children of foster carers
- Valuing diversity
- Transitions
- Caring for babies
- Kinship care

Alongside our support groups we have regular 'coffee mornings', some of these are online and some are in the evenings as we try to be as inclusive as possible.

In North Somerset we are also very proud to have our Mockingbird hubs which offer support to the carers within them. We currently have 4 Mockingbird hubs which are working really well and are a great source of support, particularly to new carers and to the children of foster carers. If anyone would like to join one of our constellations please let your supervising social worker know.

You can find more information about this here: [Mockingbird Programme | The Fostering Network](#)



Fostering Responsibilities

Confidentiality

Within your role as a foster carer, you will have access to a lot of confidential, sensitive and personal information about the child or young person you are caring for and their family. This information should not be shared with others unless they need to know and should be discussed with your supervising social worker before being shared. All written paperwork and information should be securely stored and passed onto the child's social worker when possible.

Recording

Under the Fostering Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards 2011 there is a requirement for foster carers to keep records of the children they are caring for. There is training available on how to record daily records. As a foster carer, your recording is essential in understanding the lived experience of a child in your care. The information that you record as a foster carer can be requested in court, as part of making care planning decisions, risk assessments and also in addressing any allegations/ disclosures. Therefore, it is imperative that you have a sound understanding of this and attend the relative training around this. Please talk to your supervising social worker for further details and ask for a good example of a recording for a child.

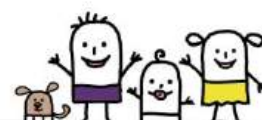
Illness/Accident/Injury

Minor illnesses should be reported to your foster child's social worker by telephone/email or on their next visit. Accidents, injuries and serious illness should be reported to the child's social worker and your supervising social worker immediately. If the child's social worker is not available, then please notify their manager or the out of hours Emergency Duty Team.

In cases of planned admissions to hospital for operations, children's services must be informed as foster carers do not have the authority to sign consent forms for surgery in these circumstances. These are signed either by the parent or a representative from children's services.

The placement information/delegated authority states clearly in which circumstances you can give consent to medical treatment. In most cases you will be able to give your consent in an emergency, but if not, the following points should be noted:

- If urgent medical treatment is needed and a delay in obtaining consent would cause suffering or put the child at risk (following an accident for example), a doctor can exercise their medical prerogative and proceed with treatment.
- A young person of 16 years or over can consent to treatment/surgery.



Delegated Authority

Your supervising social worker and child's social worker will discuss with you the decisions you are able to make such as taking your foster child to the Doctor and which decisions need to be approved by social workers or family such as haircuts, holidays and overnight stays. These decisions can fall under delegated authority which is a provision agreed at Placement Planning Meetings or Children in Care review meetings, you will receive a copy of this to refer back to following the meeting. Please contact your supervising social worker to obtain further details if you need to.

Allegations

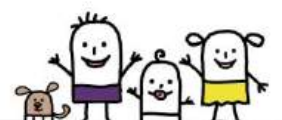
The Fostering Network have defined an allegation as *"An allegation is an assertion from any person that a foster carer or another member of the fostering household has, or may have, behaved in a way that has harmed a child, committed a criminal offence against a child or behaved towards a child in a way that indicates they are unsuitable to work with children. Allegations are more serious than general complaints against foster carers because allegations have to be investigated under the child protection procedure. Allegations should be treated differently from concerns about poor standards of care."*

We understand that as a foster carer going through an allegation investigation can be a very unsettling and challenging period in your fostering career. Whilst at North Somerset Council we take allegations seriously and want to ensure that they are investigated fairly and robustly. We also want to ensure that you have the appropriate support when such investigations occur and with your permission will refer you to the Fostering Network who will offer an independent advisor to support you. They will support you through telephone calls, emails, and home visits. They will offer emotional support and also important practical support, helping you to understand the process and procedures regarding allegations, attending any reviews you may have to go to, including the fostering panel and helping with any documentation you may have to write. Fostering Network also provides independent legal advice for a carer who is subject to an investigation and has an advice line you can contact. Their telephone number is 0800 0407675.

Allegations against foster carers will be referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and will be investigated. You will be supported by an allocated supervising social worker during the process. Your supervising social worker will not be able to discuss the investigation with you until the investigation is completed and after conclusions have been made. We provide training on managing allegations and encourage you to access this.

Standards of Care Investigations

A Standards of Care investigation will be undertaken when there is child protection concerns but the 'significant harm' threshold is not met. This would be when concerns are expressed in relation to the conduct, attitude or practices of the foster carer and it is felt that the national minimum standards are not being met.



Section 47 Investigations (Children Act 1989)

If there is a cause to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, a Section 47 investigation will be initiated.

If 'significant harm' is suspected the local authority must make, or cause to be made, such enquires as they consider necessary to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare.

Role of the Fostering Team Manager:

- Be available to you if you have any questions
- Liaise with the Local Authority Designated Officer
- Attend strategy meetings
- Liaise with other professionals involved with the investigation
- Provide any relevant information during the process of the enquiries

Role of the Supervising Social Worker

- Keep you informed of the process and any decisions that are made
- Provide any relevant information during the process of the enquiry
- Attend strategy meetings
- Ensure you are aware of where you can access independent support
- To undertake any paperwork required during the process, including household reviews and fostering panel

Role of LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer). The North Somerset Council LADO is specifically involved in cases where there is a concern or allegation regarding someone working or volunteering with children:

- has or may have harmed a child
- may have committed a criminal offence related to a child
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children

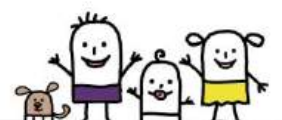
They give advice and guidance on how concerns or allegations should be investigated against adults working with children. This should not be confused with allegations made by children against other children, which is not the remit of the LADO. They do not investigate but must ensure that an appropriate investigation is carried out, whether that is by the police, children's social care or the employer or a combination of these.

If a foster carer is suspended, the continuation of their fostering allowance will continue for an additional 3 weeks and continue to contribute to their savings and pocket money. If the child is residing with the mockingbird hub carer during this period, the substantive carer should supply money for activities etc.

Use of placing foster carers on hold

Putting the foster carers on hold should be considered in any case where:

- there is cause to suspect a child is at risk of significant harm
- the allegation warrants investigation by Police or



- the allegation is of such a serious nature it might be grounds for recommending termination of approval.

It will be considered in any situation where the authority does not wish to place any further children with you while it undertakes its enquiries. If you are put on hold, it is 'without prejudice' but you will not be able to continue fostering while the situation is fully investigated unless otherwise agreed by a senior manager.

Support is available to you, and you should be kept fully informed of the process and what is happening. Sometimes we are unable to give you much information about the allegation due to the independent nature of the investigation which we would not want to prejudice. We will give you more information as soon as we are able. It is not possible to be able to say how long this may last but North Somerset Council will try and deal with things in as short a time as possible but will need to gather all the relevant information in order that a fair assessment is made.

Being placed on hold should not be seen as an automatic response to an allegation, in some cases it will not be immediately obvious that this is appropriate. The need for being on hold may only become clear after the information has been shared and/or there has been discussion with other agencies at a strategy meeting.

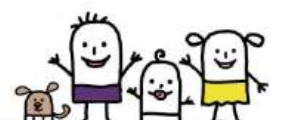
If the information about the foster carer's conduct does not require a strategy meeting, a planning meeting may be arranged to evaluate the level of concern and to determine the foster carer's suitability to continue working with children in this capacity.

Disclosures

Fostered children are likely to have experienced trauma and may have been harmed by those close to them. In a foster home, as children start to feel safe and cared for, they may willingly and unknowingly share their experience of the harm and difficult circumstances they have been exposed to. This information should be noted in your daily recordings and shared with your supervising social worker and the child's social worker as soon as possible. It is important as well that when children share their life experiences that they are not asked leading questions or questioned about the information shared. This requires training in understanding how to manage this information shared by children, and we recommend that you complete training related to this and that you use your supervision sessions with your supervising social worker. The information that children disclose to you about their lived experience could assist with their care planning and decisions around keeping them safe.

Children Missing from Care

If a fostered child goes missing, please contact the Police and your supervising social worker or duty worker. If outside of office hours, please contact the Emergency Duty Team 01454 615165.



Supporting Family Time

We want to promote family time between fostered children and their family where it is necessary to do so in order to safeguard and promote their welfare. As part of the support arrangements, it may be identified that specific assistance is required to ensure that any such family time can be managed safely. If necessary, information will be made available to kinship carers about local community centres and family mediation services, and how to make use of their services. If a child is in foster care on a long term basis we would be requesting that family time is supported by the foster carer as this would be in the child's best interests.

Preparation for Independence

As a foster carer, your role is to promote children and young people in your care to develop skills to prepare them for independence as indicated in their care plan. We will work alongside you to prepare children who are in your care towards independence in a manner that is safe, individualised to the needs and abilities of the child in your care. We will help you think about the choices available and professionals around the child will support to find accommodation that is right for the child in your care. As a foster carer you will have the support of a child social worker, personal advisor for the child who should be allocated when a child reaches 16 years, and your supervising social worker to assist you in preparing your child for independent living. Children who are being prepared for leaving your care will have a Pathway Plan which details how we can all prepare them for independent living.

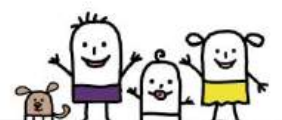
Diversity & Equality

Standard 2 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering makes note that foster carers are tasked with "Promoting a positive identity, potential and valuing diversity through individualised care". North Somerset Council supports foster carers to ensure that all children in their care have individualised care plans that address their needs, wishes, feelings, and carefully consider their identity including their ethnicity, religious, sexuality and gender. There is a support group that is held which will provide additional support and information if needed. Your supervising social worker can also support you with any needs you may have.

Meetings Foster Carers Attend

As a foster carer with North Somerset Council we regard you as a key professional in the Team Around Child (TAC). Your role as a foster carer is essential in ensuring that the lived experiences of the child or young person in your care are shared with the team around the child. Your experience and observations of a child are important as they can assist in decisions being made about a child's care plan, future homes, health needs, educational needs, family time with people that are close to them, and decisions on how to keep them safe. It is expected that you attend the meetings listed below and any other additional meetings related to the welfare of your fostered child.

1. Child looked after (Review) Meetings



2. Personal Educational Plan Meetings
3. Safeguarding meetings / Section 47 inquiry meetings
4. Placement Planning meetings
5. Health meetings
6. Stability Meetings
7. Permanency Planning Meetings
8. Long Term Matching Meetings

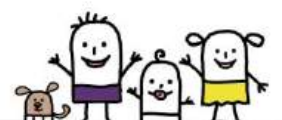
Some meetings are now being held virtually, and you are asked to attend using Teams. In order to prepare for the meetings, you can speak to your supervising social worker about what is appropriate to share and what questions to ask. Your supervising social worker will explain the purpose of these meetings, your role, and how to present your information beforehand. You will find it helpful to have a small summary of how the child in your care has been, noting dates of appointments, meetings held to share. You can share this summary with your supervising social worker. If you feel that it would be helpful, you can ask for your supervising social worker to attend the meeting with you.

The review of your Approval as a Foster Carer:

In most circumstances there will be an annual review of foster carers, the first annual review will be presented at fostering panel and every third review following this. For reviews that do not go to panel they will be chaired by an Independent Fostering Reviewing Officer (IFRO). The IFRO is employed by North Somerset Council but is independent. In some circumstances reviews can take place more frequently in the event of a significant change in circumstances of a foster carer or where there are concerns about the care provided by the foster carer as a result of a complaint or allegation. As well as formal reviews, there will be regular dialogue and feedback between the supervising social worker and the foster carer.

Prior to the formal review, the supervising social worker will send to the foster carer a copy of the review report to enable them to prepare for the review well in advance. The foster carer will have the opportunity to communicate their views verbally or in writing to the supervising social worker. The supervising social worker will also, as part of the formal review, seek the views of all members of the foster carer's household. They will also obtain the written comments from all the responsible social workers who have had children live with the foster carer since the last formal review. The supervising social worker will also seek and take into account the views of any fostered child living with the foster carer since the last review via the child's social worker. The report will be shared with the foster carer at least 10 days before the review so that nothing is presented without the opportunity to consider what has been written about them.

If the review is not being presented to fostering panel this will take place in the carers home with the supervising social worker, the Independent Fostering Review Officer and the foster carer present. The review meeting will consider the foster carer's skills development plan, an



evaluation of the training undertaken since the last review, the foster carer's views of the service and support provided as well as the care provided by the foster carer.

A review form will be completed and any recommendations discussed with the foster carer and recorded. The foster carer should have the opportunity to put their views in writing to be presented to the Fostering Panel or the Agency Decision Maker (Fostering).

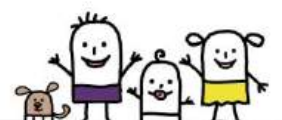
Whether presented to the fostering panel or not, the report will be presented to the Agency Decision Maker for a decision as to whether the foster carer remains suitable to foster and whether the terms of approval remain suitable. Where it has been presented to the fostering panel, the Agency Decision Maker will take into account the panel's recommendation but they will have the final decision. The foster carer will be informed in writing by the supervising social worker of the outcome of the review.

Representations / Review Procedure

Proposal to Terminate Foster Carer's Approval

Where, as a result of a review, the termination of a foster carer's approval is proposed, written notice of the proposal and the reasons must be sent to the foster carer and they must be advised that they are able to challenge the decision, this is called a qualifying determination. The carers have the opportunity to make representations to the Agency Decision Maker or to request a review by an Independent Reviewing Mechanism.

The Independent Reviewing Mechanism provide independent panels that review the suitability for persons to foster and other decisions made by North Somerset Council. Notification / representations will need to be received by the Panel Administrator within 28 days of the date of the notice of the decision being sent to them. The Panel Administrator and the Independent Review Mechanism will then notify the foster carer within 7 working days of the date when the Panel will reconsider the matter. The foster carer(s) will also be advised of independent support that can be provided by the Fostering Network. The foster carer will not have the right to request a review by an Independent Review Panel if he or she regarded as disqualified as a result of a conviction or caution for a specified offence - see Persons Disqualified from Fostering Procedure. If no written representations or notification of a request for a review are received within the period, a final decision to terminate can be made. If written representations are received within the period, the matter must be referred to the Fostering Panel for further consideration. A friend or supporter may accompany foster carers wishing to make representations in person to the Panel. Where a foster carer wishes to make representations in person, the Panel Chair may consider the Panel meeting being smaller in the number of members attending. The Panel will make a new recommendation in relation to the foster carer and a final decision will be made by the Agency Decision Maker taking into account any fresh recommendation made by the Panel. Written notice of the final decision,



together with reasons, must then be sent to the foster carer within 7 working days of the decision.

Where the termination of the approval of a foster carer is being considered, plans for the moving of any fostered children will also be required and made as appropriate. Where the approval is terminated, the Agency Decision Maker, in consultation with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) will decide whether to refer the former foster carer to the Disclosure and Barring Service for inclusion of the carer's name on the Children's Barred List. During this period, as mentioned above, foster carers will continue to have the support of a supervising social worker and Fostering Network, who provide independent support during this process.

Updates on Checks

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks should be updated every 3 years and if necessary, a review of the foster carer's approval should be carried out immediately to take account of any new information. It is the foster carers responsibility to inform the fostering service as soon as possible of any offences committed or cautions with in the fostering family. Any adults residing in the home will also need to have a DBS check every 3 years alongside any alternative carers within the carers network that may be caring for the fostered child. The update service can be used for these checks.

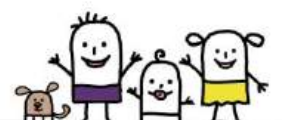
Whilst there is no statutory time interval, as good practice medical information should also be updated at least every 3 years by writing to the foster carer's GP. In the event of any serious concerns about the foster carer's health, a review of the foster carer's approval should be carried out immediately.

Resignation by Foster Carers

A foster carer may give written notice at any time of their wish to resign from the role. Once written notice has been given, their approval will automatically be terminated 28 days after receipt of the notice. The foster carer cannot withdraw their notice once it has been received, nor can the Agency Decision Maker decline to accept the resignation. Should a foster carer who has applied to resign or who has resigned subsequently wish to foster again, they will need to be assessed again. There is no requirement for the fostering panel to be notified of resignations. However, here at North Somerset Council, we monitor resignations at panel.

Retention and Exit Interview

We recognise that the role of being a foster carer can be emotionally, physically and mentally challenging. As outlined under 'Support for Foster carers', we offer a variety of support along your fostering task to ensure that you feel supported and skilled in training for children in care. However, should you feel that you are considering leaving the service, then we ask that

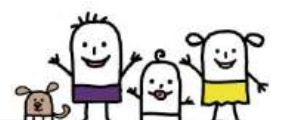


you contact your supervising social worker, or their manager in order to consider what further support we may offer you. We are extremely passionate about retaining our foster carers and want everyone to feel valued and appreciated. Should you still wish to resign from your role as a foster carer with North Somerset Council, then we ask that you complete an exit interview to assist us in reflecting on how we can continue to improve on our service.

Disqualified Foster carers

A person is disqualified from acting as a foster carer (unless a relative of the child or already acting as a foster carer) if s/he or any adult member of the household has been cautioned for or convicted of a specified offence committed at the age of 18 or over. A specified offence is defined as an offence against a child, an offence specified in Part 1 of Schedule 4 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, the importation/possession of indecent photographs of a child under 16 and any other offence which involves bodily injury to a child (other than common assault or battery). A list of these offences is set out in the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000, except that it does not include an offence contrary to section 9 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (sexual activity with a child) where the offender was under 20 when the offence was committed and the child was aged 13 or over. In addition, a person is disqualified from acting as a foster carer for the agency (unless a relative of the child or already acting as a foster carer) if s/he or any adult member of the household has been cautioned for or convicted of an offence specified in paragraph 1 of part 2 of Schedule 4 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 committed at the age of 18 or over OR falls within paragraph 2 or 3 of Part 2 of Schedule 4, notwithstanding that the offences listed have been repealed.

Where information is provided or updating Disclosure and Barring Service checks reveal that an approved foster carer has been convicted of or cautioned for a criminal offence as a result of which he or she will become a disqualified person unless consent is given, an urgent review of the foster carer's approval should be held. A written report detailing the circumstances leading to the conviction/caution, together with background information from the foster carer's file, must be presented to the Fostering Panel as soon as possible. The report should contain a recommendation on whether consent should be granted to allow the foster carer to continue to be approved as a foster carer for the child or children currently residing there. A copy of the report should be sent to the Panel Administrator at least 10 working days before the relevant Panel meeting. The Agency Decision Maker will consider the recommendation of the Fostering Panel on any such applications and will be recorded in writing and a copy placed on the case record of the foster carer. Written notice of the decision, together with reasons, must then be sent to the foster carer as soon as practicable. It is important to note that should a foster carer be disqualified from fostering with North Somerset Council, and they decide to pursue another agency, that the agency is required to check whether they have been barred from fostering.



Staying Put

North Somerset Council has developed a Staying Put policy in order to ensure that young people can continue to live with former foster carers after their 18th birthday and make the transition to independent living at a pace that suits their needs. This includes young people living away from their former foster carer's home for temporary periods such as attending higher education courses or training. Please ask your supervising social worker for a copy of this policy.

The policy sets out:

- The process for a Staying Put arrangement
- The financial requirements and benefit issues for young people
- The financial rates and payment implications for foster carers and staying put carers
- The agreement between the carer and the young person

Transfer Protocol for Foster Carers

Introduction

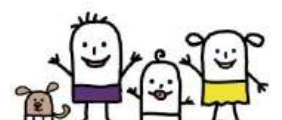
This refers to the movement of registered foster carers between fostering providers where carers are planning on transferring to North Somerset Council. The Transfer of Foster Carers Protocol England (2014) re-issued 2015 was developed in partnership with the Fostering Network, the joint forum of independent fostering providers and the Association of Directors of Children's Services, to explain and clarify the steps to be followed when a foster carer wishes to transfer between one fostering provider and another.

Aims:

- To ensure continuity and best quality of care for children in a foster home during any transfer of foster carers between fostering providers
- To minimise the length of time taken in the transfer process
- To provide an outline for the negotiation of the financial implications of the transfer between providers
- To ensure that foster carers are not under pressure into changing their fostering provider.
- To recognise the welfare of any child in the foster home is paramount
- Foster carers have the right to freedom of movement between fostering providers
- All fostering providers should be committed to increasing the overall pool of foster carers by the active recruitment of people new to fostering.

Initial Enquiry and Visit:

- The applicant/s express their interest to North Somerset Council.
- Initial enquiry to take place.
- Allocated for initial home visit if the initial enquiry is positive.



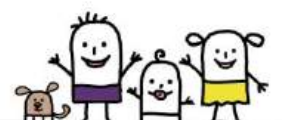
- Initial home visits to the applicant/s should be used to gather relevant information.
- The protocol should be explained clearly so that the applicant is fully aware of what to expect and the steps they should take.
- The Supervising Social Worker to obtain the current allowances/fees the foster carer/s are receiving from their current provider.

If after the initial visit/s the applicant/s wishes to proceed and wish to progress the transfer to North Somerset Council the following steps will be taken:

- The assessing social worker should seek to obtain agreement from the Team Manager and Head of Service in relation to the fees which will be paid should all parties wish to progress the transfer.
- The foster carer must write to their current agency to advise them of their intention to transfer to another agency, and give their consent for North Somerset Council to view their files.
- Foster carer completes application form.
- North Somerset Council writes to foster carer's current provider, confirming the intention of the foster carer, and North Somerset Council's awareness of this. The letter also requests a reference and access to files. If there is/are child/ren being fostered by the carer North Somerset Council will also advise the current authority/agency that it is their responsibility to notify the placing authority, where other than North Somerset Council.
- It is good practice for the assessing social worker to contact the current provider directly at this stage in order to seek acknowledgement that they have received the letter and are aware of North Somerset Council's intentions to proceed. This contact also provides an opportunity to set a date for the Protocol Meeting (if child/ren in placement).
- The assessing social worker should now progress further checks and references.
- The assessing social worker to obtain management approval to progress the assessment, and confirmation from Head of Service about level of fees.
- The assessing social worker to inform the Children's Placements team of the enquiry, and intention to progress the application, where child/ren are being fostered.

When a foster carer seeks to move to a new provider, the new provider seeks information from the previous provider about the foster carer, and the previous provider complies with such a request within one month of receipt of the written request. (NMS 26.9).

In the interest of safeguarding the welfare of children in placement, the onus will be on the current provider to prepare a comprehensive, accurate reference and on the recruiting provider to undertake a comprehensive re-assessment.



Get Involved

As you embark on your role as a foster carer, you will find that with time, you develop a skill set and knowledge base, which you share with other foster carers who may be going through a challenging time, and newly approved foster carers. Therefore, you may find that you wish to become more involved in the recruitment, training, and support of foster carers. This is also a requirement for foster carers at advanced level.

Refer a Friend

The Fostering Service always has a need for foster carers, who are willing to be trained and skilled in how to care for some of our children and young people. We recognise that you as our foster carer are one of most powerful and valuable asset in how we recruit future foster carers. Therefore, we offer a referral incentive when you refer a friend or family member to fostering.

Once approved, we offer a monetary incentive to say thank you for helping us recruit new carers to care for our children. Please contact your Supervising social worker or Recruitment Manager for details on how you can apply for this. We welcome any informal chats with any person that is considering becoming a foster carer, they must mention you by name for you to receive our payment.

Buddying / Mentoring

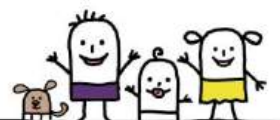
We encourage a buddying and mentoring scheme in North Somerset Council as we recognise that fostering can be emotionally challenging, we want you to draw from support from your supervising social worker, and other experienced foster carers. We recognise that these connections happen naturally through pre-existing relationships or relationships that grow from carers attending meetings such as support groups or training courses. Your supervising social worker can also link new foster carers up with more experienced carers as an additional support which can be very helpful as foster carers start their new fostering career.

Training

North Somerset Council offers many training courses to foster carers, support groups and activities which involve foster carers. We have found that foster carers also enjoy learning from other experienced foster carers who share their experience and knowledge of fostering. We encourage you to come forward and join in, in various activities that the fostering service offer. Please speak to your Supervising social worker on how to get involved in this.

Compliments, Comments and Complaints Process

The Council aims to provide a high standard of service to the children we look after, foster carers and applicants. The Council welcomes your views and comments about the services



provided. Obtaining such views will help us to know what we are doing well and what we need to improve on. We recognise that there will be times when you feel that you wish to raise a complaint.

Foster carers and children have the right to make a complaint, and we encourage you to speak to your supervising social worker, as the first point of addressing your complaint. We welcome formal complaints as well through the Council's formal complaints procedure, foster carers are able to make effective representations, including complaints, about any aspect of the fostering service, whether it is provided directly by an authority or by a contracted authority or agency.

Helpful links:

[Local Government Ombudsman Website.](#)

Contact the Local Government office: 0300 061 0614 ('Call back' to 0762 481 1595).

[Kinship: Home | The Kinship care charity | England and Wales](#)

The Fostering Network [Home Get Expert Fostering Advice & Support | The Fostering Network](#)

[Complaints about council services | North Somerset Council](#)

[Fostering Guidance - MASTER](#)

[The Fostering Services \(England\) Regulations 2011](#)

