North Somerset Council

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North Somerset Fostering Service

Criteria for achieving and maintaining foster carer skills levels

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Introduction and overview

In North Somerset, foster carers' income is made up of two main elements; an age-related allowance, paid on a fortnightly basis for the child, and a weekly skills fee per child (also paid fortnightly), depending on the carer's skill level.

Payments to foster carers can only be made when they have attended Fostering Panel and the recommendation has been ratified by the Agency Decision Maker, or under Regulation 24 (Care Planning & Placement Regulations) where the approval is for kinship foster carers.

Approval at the different skills payment levels will depend on:

- The foster carers' assessed core skills.
- Their experience of caring for and supporting children and young people.
- Training and skills development that has been undertaken.
- Their proven ability to meet the National Minimum Standards.
- Completion of the recommendations on their Skills Development Plan (SDP).

There are three main skills levels each with increasing expectations of availability and skill. This document sets out the criteria required of a foster carer for each skills level.

Level	Weekly Payment
Foundation	£81.19
Intermediate	£137.58
Advanced	£191.78

In addition to this there are Mockingbird Hub carers who receive a specific allowance in line with the expectations of their role. There is an expectation that they are advanced level carers (or working towards this). We also have single placement, specialist and parent and child placement fees which will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

In some circumstances we may have potential foster carers who have completed relevant training or have the skills and experience to commence their fostering journey with North Somerset on a higher level. This will be a decision made by the team manager, in consultation with the fostering independent reviewing officer. The applicants will be advised accordingly.

Pre-approval training

Our standard mandatory pre-approval training is:

- Skills to Foster / Skills to Care
- Safeguarding Children Level 2 (Training Hub)
- Paediatric First Aid (Training Hub)
- Secure Base (Training Hub)

Foster carers will be asked to complete safeguarding and first aid training face to face during their first year of approval in addition to the short on-line course at the pre-approval stage. The assessing social worker may also ask foster carers to complete further training if they feel that they would benefit from it. Once foster carers have completed the above training this will then ensure that they are ready to progress to foundation level following their approval at fostering panel.

Foundation level:

It is expected that most foster carers will commence their fostering journey on Foundation Level. Foundation level carers are usually newly approved carers who have completed their pre-approval training. Any additional training, in line with a potential carers skills and experiences can be requested by the assessing social worker.

Foster carers must be able to demonstrate that they have met the training stipulated above when they attend fostering panel, for their initial approval. A Skills Development Plan (SDP) will be part of this evidence and will confirm areas of training recommended during their first year of fostering.

Once carers achieve their foundation level, they can start to work towards meeting the criteria of the intermediate level. Mandatory training for the first year and essential to progress to intermediate level is as follows:

- Completion of Training Support and Development Standards (mainstream carers have 12 months to complete these, kinship carers have 18 months)
- Child Protection – Basic Awareness (face to face)
- Paediatric First Aid (face to face)
- Reporting and Recording (Training Hub)
- Internet Safety (Training Hub)
- Equality and Diversity (Training Hub)
- Education, Health and Care Plans (Training Hub)
- Child Sexual Exploitation (Training Hub)
- Any additional training in line with the carer's approval and training needs as detailed in their SDP.

Intermediate Level:

Following their first year of approval, foster carers will return to panel for their first annual fostering review with their SDP, having completed their mandatory training and other training recommended. If this has not been completed, reasons why this has not been achieved and a realistic action plan on their SDP must be presented. To progress to intermediate level, carers must have also completed their Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS) within their first year of approval. This is a regulatory requirement for all foster carers including kinship carers (kinship carers have 18 months to complete their TSDS). If foster carers fail to complete these, they would not be meeting fostering regulations, and their registration would need to be reviewed.

Foster carers who wish to progress to intermediate level must also demonstrate their suitability by evidencing on their SDP how they have met the criteria and reflections on their learning. Moving to a higher skills level will usually be considered once a foster carer has completed all tasks set out on their SDP. The supervising social worker will then present the information during the annual review for agreement to be considered, if agreement is not given, there is an opportunity for this to be discussed with the head of service for corporate parenting.

When a foster carer is not meeting the criteria of their current skills level, they will be given three months to make the changes needed. Where this does not happen, their skills level will be reviewed by the Independent Fostering Reviewing Officer which could result in them being reverted to the previous level. The supervising social worker will be asked for updates by the team manager, during their supervision sessions, in order to monitor this and to avoid any delays in returning foster carers to fostering panel. In certain circumstances the head of service for corporate parenting can make this decision.

All of our kinship carers are able to move through the skills levels in the same way as mainstream carers.

Once carers have reached intermediate level, they must maintain the level by undertaking the following during the year:

- At least four separate training courses as detailed in their SDP, with reflections (each carer to complete at least 2 courses each).
- Both carers to complete any mandatory courses required (e.g. safeguarding, paediatric first aid) in person.
- Completing further learning specific to their circumstances as discussed with the supervising social worker and detailed in their SDP.
- Attending at least 2 of the foster carers collective meetings or fostering events (e.g. big thank you). If in a couple, this is an expectation of one of them, but we would love to see both of them attending. For kinship carers that do not reside locally they should speak to their supervising social worker about how we support this.
- Attending at least 1 coffee morning/evening during the year. If in a couple, this is an expectation of one of them, but we would love to see both attending.
- Adhering to meeting National Minimum Standards (e.g. completion of daily logs, this includes kinship carers).

Advanced Level:

To achieve advanced level, carers must evidence their ability to meet the criteria by completing the following:

- Advanced Child Sexual Exploitation Level 3 (both carers if in a couple).
- Advanced Child Protection Level 3 (both carers if in a couple).
- Reporting and Recording Level 3 and 4

Once carers have reached advanced level, they must maintain the level by undertaking the following during the year:

- Therapeutic Parenting Programme or a course similar in nature suggested by their supervising social worker and the training co-ordinator.
- Non-Violence Resistance if applicable to the children they are caring for.
- Any courses that carers may complete which are relevant to the fostering role.
- Completing any courses on their SDP identified by the supervising social worker.

- At least four separate training courses as detailed in their SDP, with reflections. If in a couple, we would like at least two of these to be completed per carer.
- Completing any mandatory courses required e.g. safeguarding/first aid.
- Completing further learning specific to their circumstances as discussed with their supervising social worker and detailed in their SDP.
- Adhering to National Minimum Standards (e.g. completing logs for every child in their care).
- Attending at least 2 of the foster carer's collective meetings or fostering events (e.g. big thank you). If in a couple, this is an expectation of one of them, but we would love to see both attending.
- Attending at least 1 coffee morning/evening during the year. If in a couple, this is an expectation of one of them, but we would love to see both attending.
- Supporting newly approved foster carers including kinship carers by providing a mentoring role where applicable, this could include supporting carers to complete their TSDS. We don't expect both to do this if they are in a couple, unless this is their preference.
- Assisting with at least 2 recruitment events per year or supporting training sessions. We don't expect both to do this if they are in a couple, unless this is their preference.

We appreciate all of the work that our foster carers do for the children that they look after, we recognise that this can be really challenging at times. We would like to support them as much as we can to achieve the skills levels that warrant the work that they undertake but we also acknowledge that not all foster carers will want to move up through the levels. Maintaining the criteria for their skills level is extremely important as this reflects their continual professional development in line with their role as foster carer.