



Somerset Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2020 - 2021

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Somerset County Council

Fostering Service

2020 – 2021

This Statement of Purpose sets out what services are provided for children who are placed with Somerset's Fostering Service and also includes those provided by other agencies.

The Statement of Purpose is available on the Somerset County Council website www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk

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1. Introduction

This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirements of Standard 16 of the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011 and Chapter 4 of the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4. There is a requirement that all Fostering Services provide a written Statement of Purpose setting out the aims, objectives and details of the service and facilities provided. The Statement of Purpose should be reviewed and updated every year.

The statement is intended to provide a clear description of the service for the information of Foster Carers, service users, County Council staff, elected members, professionals in other agencies and members of the public.

Copies of the Statement of Purpose will be available to:

- Children's Services staff who are involved in providing services to children and young people in care
- Foster Carers and people who are being assessed as Foster Carers
- Somerset's Children in Care Council
- Somerset's Foster Care Association
- Somerset's Consultative Group

Somerset County Council Fostering Service is fully committed to meeting the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards including the values statement and ensuring that children in care, birth families and prospective and approved Foster Carers understand what they can expect from the service.

The service recognises the central importance of foster care as a vehicle for improving the lives of children who need to be looked after. Foster Carers play a pivotal role and should, therefore, be provided with excellent preparation, training and support to carry out their role to maximum effect. Somerset is committed to the Foster Carer's Charter.

As a responsible Corporate Parent, Somerset is committed to listening to the voice of each child and young person, assessing their needs and comprehensively planning to

meet them. The Fostering Service will work in effective partnership with families, Foster Carers, colleagues within the County Council, for example education, and other agencies with the objective of delivering the best possible care and support to children in foster care.

2. Somerset County Council's Vision

The County Plan, and the Children, Young People, and Families Plan 2019 - 2022 (CYPFP) outline the organisational values that reflect the Council's Vision and Purpose, providing a set of consistent, simple values that will guide our attitudes and behaviours. These values define how we do things and are the principles by which we work together and with our customers and partners.

The vision of all services working with children, young people and families, is for the 110,000 children and young people in Somerset to be safe, healthy, happy, ambitious for their future and develop skills for life.

We want all children and young people to grow up in loving families and caring communities, and understand that Parents, families, friends, Schools and wider community activity have the greatest influence and make the biggest difference to what children and young people aspire to and what they achieve. We want every child and young person in Somerset to have:

Supported Families – *‘strengthening families and building resilience’*

Healthy Lives – *‘families making the right choices to support happy healthy lifestyles’*

Great Education - *‘high aspirations, opportunities and achievements for all’*

Positive Activities – *‘getting the most out of life through play, leisure, cultural and sporting opportunities’*

2019 - 2022 (CYPFP)

The number of children in care in Somerset during 2019/20 has averaged between 530-540.

3. Legislative and Policy Framework

Children Act 1989

Care Standards Act 2000

Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

Children Act 2004

Children and Young Persons Act 2008

Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011

Independent Review of Determinations (Adoption and Fostering) Regulations 2009

Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010

The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013

Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010

Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006

Statutory guidance

Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011)

These replace the standards published in 2002.

Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)

Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989

Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (July 2013)

Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulation Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (2010)

Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers (2010)

Working Together to Safeguard Children: A Guide to Inter-agency Working to Safeguard and Promote the Welfare of Children (March 2015)

Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (2011)

4. Aims and Objectives

Somerset's Fostering Service is ambitious and aims to provide an outstanding service to all children in foster care through the recruitment, training and support of Foster Carers who are able to meet the needs of our children through childhood and into adulthood.

Our overall priorities within the Fostering Service are to ensure that:

- All children who come into care have a safe place to live where they can grow, thrive and lead happy and fulfilled lives
- We respond appropriately to the assessed needs of all children to ensure that they and their families are supported to ensure their life chances are maximised by their experience of the service.
- We achieve early permanence for children in care and children who cannot remain at home safely are offered a permanent family-based alternative as quickly as possible (See Permanence Policy Statement)
- We have sufficient foster families to allow choice and enable best matching.

The main aims of the service are:

1. To provide all children in foster care with well-planned, high quality, local care, with local families, which can meet their needs and will enhance their life experiences and improve their lives. All children should experience a happy childhood, benefitting from excellent parenting, care and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
2. To achieve permanence in foster care for all children whose plan it is to remain in foster care.
3. To ensure the central importance of the child's relationship with their Foster Carer is understood and Foster Carers are recognised as core members of the team working with the child or young person.

4. To recruit sufficient Foster Carers with the relevant skills and experience to offer alternative family choices, good matching and placement stability.
5. To provide high quality supervision, support and training services to Foster Carers by suitably experienced, skilled and qualified people.
6. To provide a progression pathway which encourages Foster Carers to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding and supports them to consider caring for children with more complex needs.
7. To take into account children's and young people's wishes and feelings and encourage them to participate in decisions about their care.
8. To recognise and support the unique role family and friends play in enabling children and young people to remain with adults they know and trust if they cannot, for whatever reason, live with their parents/significant adult(s).
9. To recognise and value the significance of maintaining positive relationships with parents, carers, the wider family and other significant people.
10. To provide and work with local fostering families to promote continuity of education, services, and to maintain family networks.
11. To promote the educational achievements of children looked after and ensure Foster Carers are supported to work with schools and the Virtual School to improve the educational achievement of children and young people in their care.
12. To promote and support fostering stability and consistency of care. Care with fostering families should only end in a planned and considered way.
13. To value each child as an individual and ensure support is provided in line with their individual needs and background, developing their identity, self-confidence and self-value.
14. To care for siblings together, whenever possible and appropriate, and being consistent with their assessed individual needs and informed by a sibling assessment.
15. To recognise and respond to the particular needs of children and young people, and to those who may have complex or additional needs. A series of short breaks to help the children remain within their own families will form part of this provision.

16. To support children in foster care through the use of delegated authority, to have the opportunity to experience a positive family life and childhood without unnecessary restrictions.
17. To support young people to 'stay put' in their foster families beyond their eighteenth birthday subject to agreed criteria and this being in the best interests of the young person and with the full agreement of the Foster Carers/families.
18. To support Foster Carers to promote the emotional and physical health and wellbeing of children and young people.

5. Management, Staffing and Service Structure

The Fostering Service is part of Children's Social Care under the overall leadership and direction of the Director of Children's Social Care. The Director reports to the Chief Executive (the most senior officer in the council) and also to the Corporate Parenting Group.

The Corporate Parenting Group is a group of people who meet regularly to oversee services provided to Children in Care and those Leaving Care. It includes elected Council members, Senior Children's Social Care Managers, representatives from the Children in Care Council, Health and Education.

Refer to *Appendix 1* for the Structure Chart. All staff are appropriately qualified and experienced for the roles they fulfil.

The Head of Service (East) for Children Looked After and Leaving care, and Fostering Services has overall responsibility for the management of the Fostering Service and is the Responsible Individual.

The Strategic Operations Managers for Resources (Fostering) provides the Operational management of the service and is the Registered Manager of the Service.

The Head of Service – Quality Assurance, Principal Child and Family Social Worker is the Agency Decision Maker (ADM). The ADM makes decisions regarding the suitability of prospective carers and the continued approval of existing carers taking into account the recommendation of the Fostering Panel.

The Strategic Operations Manager, Permanence and Wellbeing is the Nominated Officer for Fostering and Kinship Services.

The Deputy Director for Children's Services is the Nominated Officer for Fostering to Adopt.

The Independent Chair of the Fostering Panel is responsible for leadership of two Fostering Panels on the East and the West of the county.

The Fostering Panel Advisor role is undertaken by the Strategic Operations Managers for Resources; however this is delegated to Team Managers from the Fostering Service where appropriate.

Business Support resources are provided from a centralised team, with individual service support for Fostering and Resources.

6. Services Provided

Somerset's Fostering Service is responsible for:

- The recruitment and assessment of Foster Carers
- The support, supervision and training of Foster Carers
- The provision of sufficient safe and aspirational fostering families locally for children looked after, keeping siblings together where assessed as the right plan
- The delivery of specialist schemes to support children into their fostering families swiftly and successfully

- Developing and providing Foster Carer training to upskill carers knowledge, and experience
- Suitable and appropriate matching of carers to meet individual childrens needs
- The promotion of stability and consistency of care
- Identifying dilemmas and difficulties, and holding a fostering support meeting to identify a plan appropriate to children, young people and carers
- Providing regular support and supervision to Foster Carers, in line with the fostering national minimum standards, and best practice
- The allocation of Supervising Social Workers to each approved foster family

Fostering in Somerset (FIS) / Recruitment Team

Fostering in Somerset (FIS) is responsible for the initial enquiries, recruitment, preparation training, and the assessment of all prospective Foster Carers to the point of approval by the Fostering Panel and Agency Decision Maker. However, following recent changes in the service, the function of this team in respect of assessments will be incorporated into the East and West teams from September 2021. (See structure chart). A new *recruitment team* will be established which will focus primarily on customer service for potential carers, and be able to use expertise to deliver fast, efficient information to enquiries and will work in collaboration with the Communications Officer and Assessing Social Workers in the east and west teams.

Placements Team

This team provides the duty system which accepts all referrals for children needing foster care and then identifies appropriate placement family options for those children and young people. They are responsible for the initial matching of the needs of the child or young person with the strengths, skills, experience, and knowledge of the Foster Carers.

Emergency placement requests can also be dealt with by the Emergency Duty Team.

Where possible Foster Carers are identified with Somerset's own Foster Carers, however, in the absence of suitable provision in-house alternative placements are identified from Independent Fostering Agencies. The Placements Team is responsible for making placement agreements and contracts with providers with the support of colleagues in Commissioning and Procurement. Somerset is also a member of the South West Peninsula Group where Local Authorities in the South West work together with independent providers to ensure sufficient and good quality external placement provision with preferred providers.

East and West Fostering Teams

There are two teams across Somerset who provide supervision and support to Foster Carers who are approved with SCC Fostering Service. Foster Carers in these teams can provide short term, intermediate and longer term, permanent foster placements, in accordance with their approval. There are also a number of Foster Carers, under the linked carer scheme who provide support and care to children identified in residential provisions with a plan to move to foster care or return home. The link carer acts as a secondary support and care mechanism and will assist with the transition for a child to return home or to their matched fostering family. The link carer will stay in contact once a child moves, and support the ongoing arrangements, if required.

Short term Foster Carers look after a child or young person for a limited period of time while arrangements are made for the child to return to their birth family or to an alternative fostering family or care provision

Long term Foster Carers provide permanent care for a child or young person who have been matched with them, after being presented to permanence panel, who consider and agree to this arrangement. This is a good care plan for some children where adoption is not appropriate, such as those who may be older and who have close links with their birth family. Some long-term fostering arrangements can come to an end if and when a Foster Carer applies and is successfully granted a Special Guardianship Order, in respect of the child they care for. They can then transfer to our Kinship Team,

receiving support, supervision, training and guidance where needed. This is a positive step as a child remains within their foster family, ceasing to be looked after.

Some Foster Carers provide a home for a small number of children and young people who attend residential Schools and do not have family members to care for them during weekends and holidays. During term time Foster Carers remain in contact with the children and young people to offer support, guidance, care and are an important part of the child's network.

The East and West Fostering Teams also receive support from Family Finders who focus on the identification of permanent placements for children who remain in foster care, and their transitions. The Family Finders work closely with the Placements Team to explore all potential options.

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

Short Break Care

These Foster Carers provide placements for children with disabilities. The majority are cared for on a short break stay for time limited periods such as one weekend a month or two evenings per week. This is a countywide service managed within Fostering East, and helps support families to care for children, and long-standing relationships are built and maintained. Following service development, from September 2021, the support of short break carers will be incorporated into the east and west service (see structure chart).

Emergency Fostering

Any of Somerset's approved Foster Carers who are in a position to offer time limited emergency fostering provision via 'on call' arrangements can participate in this scheme providing their approval range offers the flexibility required for emergency

placements and they have the skills to manage unplanned placements where there may be little information available. Additional fees are payable when this service is offered. This scheme enables Somerset to provide time limited placements whilst assessments are undertaken to inform longer term plans.

The Kinship Team

Connected Persons (Family and Friends Fostering)

Somerset is committed to placing children with family or friends with whom a child is already familiar rather than with Foster Carers the child does not know, if at all possible. The child's Social Worker usually identifies these carers by exploring the child's support network.

Family and Friends Foster Carers are known as 'Connected Persons'. There is provision for children to live with a relative or friend for up to sixteen weeks without the prior approval of the Fostering Panel. Temporary approval is agreed via a Regulation 24 assessment and approved by the Kinship Operational Manager. These arrangements must be assessed and presented to Fostering Panel within 16 weeks, unless an extension is granted under regulation 25, for up to a further 8 weeks.

Outside of fostering, the Kinship Service, also supports Special Guardianships, and private fostering arrangements

Family Assessment & Support Team (FA&ST)

FA&ST carers provide placements to parent(s) and their child(ren) (0 – 5 years) together for time limited assessments or support. These placements support an assessment of a parent's capacity to meet their child's needs and keep them safe. The FA&ST Foster Carers play a key role in assisting and supporting parents to develop their parenting skills. The FA&ST provides independent parenting assessments of those parents in placement and also offers community-based assessments for children 0 – 5 years.

ARC (Attachment, Relationship, Connection) Fostering:

The ARC Team's primary focus is to offer a wraparound package of support to long term and link carers who are caring for children stepping forward from residential care. This is to help build a positive and robust relationship between both sets of carers and the child in recognition that our carers are key individuals in supporting children to recover from developmental trauma. This support to the carers can be bolstered further by the team working directly with the child, the child's birth family where appropriate and their School in order to promote consistent approaches in line with therapeutic care.

The small team also provides direct support to children where it is identified that a specialist therapeutic role is needed and would benefit the child and offers support in reunification and reconnection for children with their birth parents, families and networks.

From September 2021, The ARC and FA&ST teams, will sit under a wider specialist fostering team (see structure chart).

Stepping Stones for young people age 16+

This is a scheme for young people aged 16 - 21 who are ready to live more independently with carers who provide a less intensive level of care and support.

Fostering for Adoption, and Adopt South West

Somerset is committed to planning for children in a way that achieves permanence as quickly as possible and keeps the number of placements for a child to a minimum.

Where the plan for the child is adoption, Somerset continues to develop its practice in relation to fostering for adoption enabling young children to be placed with carers who can become their adopters prior to final care plans being agreed. Somerset work in collaboration with the regional adoption agency *Adopt Southwest*, who assess,

approve, and deliver the care and support for foster to adopt, and the fostering service provide information in respect of fostering, training, and process fostering payments as required.

Children Looked After Teams

Each child looked after has an allocated Social Worker who is responsible for that child or young person. The Social Worker takes the lead on assessing needs, care planning to permanence and supporting the child whilst in the care of Somerset County Council. Fostering work closely and in partnership with CLA and Safeguarding teams, developing and sustaining relationships to promote the child/young person's care plan.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO)

IRO's are qualified and suitably experienced Social Workers who chair the reviews of children looked after, confirm their care plans and oversee that the plans are implemented in a timely and appropriate manner.

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

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

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

This includes any allegation against a Foster Carer. The Fostering Service has a policy and procedure for investigating allegations made against Foster Carers.

Medical Advisor

The appointed Medical Advisor provides specialist medical advice for Foster Carers, Social Workers and the Fostering Panels.

The Designated Nurse for Children Looked After

The designated Nurse for children looked after is responsible for the organisation of health assessments and overseeing and promoting the emotional, mental, and physical health of children in care.

Somerset's Virtual School

The Virtual School led by the Virtual School Head is responsible for promoting the educational achievement of children in care and supporting them with training and preparation for employment. There is a statutory requirement that every child looked after has a current Personal Education Plan (PEP). This plan is reviewed every term as part of a formal meeting and the Virtual School oversees the development and delivery of PEPs.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

CAMHS can provide specialist mental health services for children and young people looked after.

The Family Intervention Service (FIS)

The Family Intervention Service (FIS) is a specialist county-wide service developed through the joining of established Team 8 and Getset Level 3 Services. It offers support to children and young people from birth up to 18 years and their families where multiple complex issues are present.

The aim of combining these two services is to prevent overlap or confusion over roles and responsibilities, with a clearly defined service specification for our families, communities, and partners.

The service provides increased flexibility over operating hours and aid co-ordination by operating between 7am to 10pm, including a duty service for over 10s in crisis after 5pm and at weekends.

There are two Family Intervention Teams in each of the four district council areas, a total of 8 teams. They work closely together with partners and communities to provide effective support for families experiencing complex issues with a better, more focussed use of the Council's resources in meeting family needs.

The team may work with families where an individual over 18 has Special Educational Needs, is at risk of homelessness or where younger children are in the home dependent upon team capacity and local managerial agreement.

Emotional Health and Wellbeing Team (EHWT)

EHWT work with looked after children and care leavers and the system around them. Strong multi-agency working is vital in supporting the complex emotional needs of our children and young people. Relationships are the most crucial part of recovery from developmental trauma and the team's approach is informed by attachment and trauma theories.

A large amount of EHWT's work is focused on developing trauma-informed systems by offering training, such as Attachment-Based Parenting, supporting specific projects and providing informal consultations with professionals. EHWT have dedicated time each month in each area office for informal consultation. EHWT are often invited to attend meetings such as CLA reviews, placement planning meetings, placement support meetings, JUMP meetings, or Foster Carer supervisions.

EHWT offer more in-depth multiagency consultation and psychological formulation regarding specific young people following a 'request for involvement'. The purpose of these team consultations is to develop a cohesive therapeutic network around the

child. In some circumstances EHWT will offer further intervention, such as support for Foster Carers and direct therapeutic work with the child/young person.

7. Functions of the Fostering Service

Recruitment of Foster Carers

A recruitment strategy is in place that supports the recruitment of a sufficient number and range of local Foster Carers to meet the needs of Somerset's children in care. This is reviewed annually and delivers a targeted recruitment campaign countywide. Recruitment uses a broad approach in its campaign, with focused recruitment drives in certain areas, such as for teenagers, parent(s) and child(ren) and for specialist carers to meet the needs of children with more complex needs.

Information about fostering can be obtained from Somerset County Council's website and preliminary enquiries made with the Fostering Recruitment Officers at www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk and by telephone 0800 587 9900.

The Fostering in Somerset website contains comprehensive information about the types of fostering Somerset provides and the process for becoming a Foster Carer. Prospective carers can read our Foster Carer's stories and find out general information about the type of children who need foster families.

Experienced Foster Carers are involved in recruitment activity to share their knowledge and skills at the early stage of the fostering process. A prompt and professional response is provided to anyone enquiring about becoming a Somerset Foster Carer.

Following the initial enquiry, the next stage is an in-depth phone call to explore what the enquirer might have to offer and to answer any questions they might have. If the decision is to progress further an initial home visit is made by a suitably qualified Social

Worker, or/and a skilled Recruitment Officer. Where the enquirer and Recruitment Officer believe that it is appropriate to move forward, an application form is completed.

Assessment of Foster Carers

Prospective carers are well prepared for the fostering task through a robust assessment of suitability. This includes training that focuses on capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way which will meet the child's developmental needs.

Checks and references are obtained in accordance with the regulations to support the assessment.

Somerset aims to complete assessments within 6 months. Assessments for our target groups will be fast-tracked. At the end of the process the assessment will have explored the applicant's knowledge of childcare, assessment of general parenting skills, their ability to work in partnership with professionals and the families of children looked after and their commitment to learning and development. For prospective carers of our specialist fee paid schemes, suitability for these is specifically considered within the assessment.

Pre-approval training

All prospective Foster Carers must attend a preparation course known as the Skills to Foster. Courses are led by social workers and experienced Foster Carers who hold a recognised training award. A variety of venues and times are offered, and courses run regularly during the year depending on demand. Prospective carers are also offered the opportunity to attend an Introduction to Attachment and Safer Caring training course prior to approval.

Transfer of Foster Carers

The Recruitment and Assessment Teams provides advice to existing Foster Carers who want to transfer to Somerset and supports them through the process if the decision is to transfer. The Fostering Network transfer protocol is followed and the needs of any children who may be in placement are paramount. Assessing Social Workers undertake a fostering assessment and this is presented to Somerset's Fostering Panel for approval.

8. The Fostering Panel

There are 2 Fostering Panels each meeting once a month, so a Fostering Panel is held fortnightly. Additional panels are arranged as required to avoid unnecessary delay for annual reviews which need to be heard by panel and fostering approvals which support increased sufficiency.

The Fostering Panel is established, maintained and supported to meet the following requirements: Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011; Children Act Guidance Volume 4: Fostering Services 2011; The Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011 and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013. It has a central list of members who can sit on both panels with a diverse range of personal and professional backgrounds relevant to fostering. The panel is chaired by a suitably experienced independent person. There is an interview process for new panel members, and they are provided with an induction. Annual reviews are undertaken with all panel members and regular training is also provided.

9. Functions of the Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel has a number of functions:

1. To consider applications for approval and recommend whether or not a person is suitable to act as a Foster Carer, and if so on what terms should they be approved e.g., number and age of children to be placed.
2. To consider the first review of newly approved carers, and any subsequent reviews referred to it by the Fostering Service and recommend whether they remain suitable to act as Foster Carers, and if the terms of approval remain appropriate. This includes the consideration of complaints and allegations made against Foster Carers.
3. To recommend progression through the skills levels.
4. To oversee the quality of assessments carried out by the Fostering Service.
5. To give advice and make recommendations on any other matters or cases referred to the panel by the Fostering Service.
6. To monitor the out of approval and temporary connected persons arrangements made by the Fostering Service.
7. To approve and review Supported Lodgings providers.

A Fostering Panel can only deal with any business if it is quorate. This means at least five members need to be present, including either the Chair or Vice Chair and a Social Worker who has at least 3 years relevant post qualifying experience. If the Panel Chair is not present and the Vice Chair is not independent, then at least one other member must be independent.

Fostering Panel provides a key quality assurance function for Somerset County Council and makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Makers who sit independent of the Fostering Service management structure. They are responsible for the ratification of the panel's recommendations.

The ADM decisions are made within 7 working days of receipt of the recommendation and final set of panel minutes (NMS 14.9). Once the decision has been made this must

be given verbally to the applicant or Foster Carer within 2 working days and confirmed in writing within 5 working days (Regulation 27, NMS 14.10). Decision letters are sent by the panel administrators. If the decision is not to recommend approval as a Foster Carer information is provided about the appeals process and independent review process.

Minutes are taken of all Fostering Panel business.

Approvals

Applicants are strongly encouraged to attend Fostering Panel with the Social Worker who has undertaken their assessment. Panel members understand the applicants are often apprehensive about attending and so they do all they can to put applicants at their ease. The Panel Chair will meet with applicants before they join the meeting and offer them the opportunity to hear the questions Panel are going to ask. Questions are related to their application and the assessment.

The Fostering Service maintains a register of people who have been approved as Foster Carers. Records are also maintained on those not approved.

Annual Reviews of Approval

All approved Foster Carers are reviewed annually (Regulation 28). When undertaking an annual review, the Fostering Service must make enquiries and obtain which it considers necessary to review whether the Foster Carer and their household remains suitable. This will include feedback from children who have been placed with the Foster Carer, birth family members and the child's Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).

First annual reviews or reviews held following a significant concern or allegation, significant change of approvals and skills level changes are also considered by

Fostering Panel. De-registrations of Foster Carers are also presented to Fostering Panel and this includes those where there are serious concerns.

Foster Carers contribute to and are present at their reviews and receive confirmation in writing of the outcome of their review from the Agency Decision maker (ADM).

Termination of Approval

A Foster Carer may decide to cease fostering for a number of reasons. Written notice to terminate approval can be given at any time, in which case the approval is terminated 28 days after the Fostering Service receives the notice. However, it is an expectation that Foster Carers and the Fostering Service work together for the child's interest, and this period can be extended to allow for planning and good transitions. Once a Foster Carer has resigned the Fostering Service does not have to present the case for deregistration at Fostering Panel however the Panel should be notified for monitoring purposes. Any relevant information which may inform any future reference or consideration of the person's suitability to foster should be clearly recorded on file (Regulation 28).

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

If Fostering Panel makes a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) that the Foster Carer is unsuitable to remain registered and this is ratified by the ADM (qualifying determination) then a termination of approval letter is sent to the Foster Carer stating the reasons. The Foster Carer then has 28 days within which to make a representation to the decision maker or to apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for an independent review (Regulation 27). If no representation is received within 28 days, the decision stands.

Access to Files

The carer has a right of access to any information held on themselves, with the exception of third-party information and may request their file to be made available to them. Consideration for redacted information in documents is always considered, and where it is necessary to protect the identification and confidentiality of children and adults.

Third party information held on all carers includes the range of checks and references required by law in the assessment/approval process and updated within prescribed periods.

A carer may also make a request for information on behalf of a child or young person placed with them.

10. Foster Carer Participation

Foster Carer's Consultative Group

This group consists of nominated Foster Carer representatives from across the service. The group meets quarterly with Senior Fostering Managers. The Lead Member for Children's Social Care and Operations Director can also attend.

The Consultative Group considers practice and development issues for the Fostering Service and enables carers to have a voice in shaping policy and practice.

Consultative group minutes are circulated to all Foster Carers and staff within the Fostering Service.

Somerset's Foster Care Association

Somerset's Foster Care Association was launched in September 2015 and is an unconstituted voluntary organisation. The aim of the association is to provide peer support to carers and to represent the voice of carers within the Local Authority. The association has developed a closed face book page to support Foster Carers. They also have a list of carers, willing to become a buddy or mentoring carer to new carers or to those where support is needed.

The SFCA has a panel of committee members including a Secretary and Treasurer and they are always looking for new carers who can help them develop support to Foster Carers and children further; fundraisers, event organisers, people with creative thoughts or who want to help with outings and events.

11. Support to Foster Carers

Somerset Fostering Service values the work Foster Carers do and the significant contribution they make to the lives of children and young people in their care. The right support for foster families is crucial to a successful placement.

Each fostering household has an allocated Supervising Social Worker who:

- Offers support and supervision visits on a monthly basis and outside regular supervision arrangements.
- Liaises with the Placements Team and advises on and supports placement matching.
- Provides information about training and development and supports and encourages carers to attend training.
- The Childrens Looked After Social Worker takes a lead role in Placement Planning Meetings, with the Supervising Social Worker (SSW) supporting.

- Attends, supports and sometimes chairs Placement Support Meetings. These are identified and held where placements may be fragile and where additional support is required. They will also attend Children Looked After Reviews as required and asked to do so to support the fostering family and children.
- Is responsible for ensuring all statutory checks are up to date.
- Undertake the Foster Carer's annual review.

The service also has Senior Social Work Assistants who:

- Offer additional support to Foster Carers, their birth children and children and young people looked after as required.
- Facilitate support groups
- Support the Supervising Social Workers by undertaking some of the annual checks such as the household inspection.
- Organise the provision of equipment as required.
- Facilitate the WeCare2 group. (Support group for birth children and other children in a fostering family)
- Are actively involved in the provision of support activities (listed below).

Payments

All approved Foster Carers receive an allowance and fee for the child they are caring for.

Fostering allowances and fees are reviewed each year and the Fostering Fees and Allowances guidance is updated and provides details about how the fees and allowances should be used. The guidance is available to download from our website www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk

Somerset has progression and specialist fostering schemes:

We make fee payments to all our Foster Carers, and carers can progress up a payment scale when they build up their experience and complete training.

Our progression scheme provides a clear “career pathway” for Foster Carers to progress through the levels if they wish to do so. One of the scheme’s central principles is that the skills, experience, and training of Foster Carers are recognised and properly regarded, so Foster Carer fees also increase through the levels of this scheme.

Details of our various fostering schemes can be found on our website, however we have varying foster schemes which are linked to meeting children’s needs and recognising Foster Carers skills and ability: - from caring for children from residential settings (Step Forward) to our short break carer scheme (specialist in caring for children with disabilities), to our 16+ provisions:

Step Forward Fostering

Parent and Child Fostering (also known as Family Assessment and Support Team FA&ST)

Short Break Care

ARC (Attachment, Relationship, Connection)

Children who attend Residential Education Provision

Single Placement Scheme and Complex Medical Needs

Stepping Stones

Staying Put

Kinship and Connected Persons

Training

Somerset Fostering Service recognises that fostering has become increasingly demanding and complex. We are committed to providing good quality training that is accessible and relevant to all Foster Carers including online options which supports them to feel confident and be competent in their role.

There is an annual training plan for the Children's Social Care workforce which Foster Carers can access and attend alongside social workers and other members of staff. The plan is compliant with the Fostering Service National Minimum Standards and also contains developmental opportunities. The training plan is reviewed annually.

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

E-Learning workshops are offered so Foster Carers can choose to do them individually at home or in groups for additional support. Foster Carers are involved in reviewing and writing e-learning modules annually.

Training, Support and Development Standards have been developed by The Department for Education to ensure that people working with children, young people and their families have the best possible training, support and advice. Foster Carers are expected to complete the standards within the first year of their approval. Somerset Fostering Service provides support to carers including peer mentoring to help them achieve this.

Somerset's Foster Carers are encouraged and supported to take responsibility for their own professional development. This is practically supported through the creation and update of individual training and development plans. These are called Personal Development Plans (PDPs).

Somerset endeavours to ensure that at least 65% of all of its taught courses are co-delivered by Foster Carers. An in depth 'Train the Trainers' course is provided to ensure a base line of knowledge and understanding is achieved.

Mentoring

Somerset offers a mentoring scheme to experienced Foster Carers to initially support newly approved carers in completing their Training, Support and Development Standards and then develop local area informal support groups, which also links with the work of the Foster Care Association.

Support and Development Groups

The Family Assessment and Support Team (FA&ST) have their own groups which meet every two months. The East and West Fostering Teams both hold various support groups across their areas, and which are arranged by Senior Social Work Assistants and Supervising Social Workers. Foster Carers also arrange informal support gatherings and coffee mornings.

The Fostering Service arrange regular fun and celebratory events for Foster Carers, their children and the children they foster such as Christmas parties, Easter egg hunts, rounders and picnics on the beach. The Fostering Service recognises Foster Carers and awards 'long service awards', certificates, and vouchers to carers achieving various milestones.

Membership of Foster Talk

All Foster Carers are provided with membership of Foster Talk. This is a non-profit organisation that can provide independent and professional advice to Foster Carers on a range of issues including education, tax and legal matters. It also provides carers with a regular magazine, legal protection and insurance should they need these services.

We Care 2

Somerset Fostering Service recognises that fostering requires the commitment and support of the whole family. We Care 2 is a group for the sons and daughters of Foster

Carers and provides an opportunity to meet children of other foster families and share experiences whilst participating in fun activities during school holidays.

Out of hours support

The service offers direct support by phone from a Supervising Social Worker every evening until 11pm and at weekends from 8am – 11pm. The aim of this service is for carers to be able to gain support with vulnerable placements or difficult experiences.

Other support provided to Foster Carers:

- Foster Carers Handbook
- Fostering Website
- Quarterly Newsletter
- Social events for carers and their children plus virtual events
- Foster Carer's Survey to inform future developments
- A confidential counselling service, 'Care First'

12. Complaints

All complaints by Foster Carers are taken seriously. Foster Carers are able to use Somerset County Council's complaints procedure.

Complaints will be resolved informally where possible by the Supervising Social Worker or their Team Manager. Where this is not possible, they may take it to the Operations Manager or use the complaints procedure by:

Online: www.somerset.gov.uk/telluswhatyouthink

Email: somersetdirect@somerset.gov.uk

Phone: 0300 123 2224

Text: 07781 482858

In writing to: Somerset County Council, Comments, Compliments and Complaints, Customer Contact, FREEPOST NAT 9109, Taunton, Somerset, TA1 4ZA

Foster Carers are provided with information about what happens when a complaint or allegation is made specifically against them as a carer, including the process and timescales involved. Investigations into complaints and allegations are undertaken by Children's Social Care Managers, or independent social workers who report to Children's Services Senior Management Team and also inform Ofsted in individual cases.

Somerset County Council maintains a record of all complaints and allegations made against Foster Carers and their outcomes.

13. Equal Opportunities

Somerset's Fostering Service works to the Somerset County Council's Equality and Diversity Policy which is available on the Council's intranet.

Somerset's Fostering Service will treat all service users fairly, openly and with respect throughout the fostering process. Applicants wishing to be approved as Foster Carers will be considered irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability providing the fostering service considers they can safely and appropriately meet the needs of children throughout their childhood and into independence.

Every attempt will be made to find a fostering family which meets a child or young person's emotional and developmental needs taking into consideration their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability.

14. OFSTED

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

The one point of contact for all questions, queries and complaints to Ofsted is the Ofsted National Business Unit (NBU). The telephone number is 0300 123 1231. The NBU manages all calls and will redirect them as necessary. The NBU can also be contacted at enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk or at the following address:

Ofsted National Business Unit
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

15. Further Information

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually.

If you require this policy in a different language or an alternative format, such as large print, audiotape or Braille, please call 0800 587 9900 or email AandFRecruitmentEnquiryLine@somerset.gov.uk

The Statement of Purpose, Foster Carer's Handbook, and Annual Service Reports are also available on the service website www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk

A copy can also be obtained from the Named Manager:

Matthew Randles
Operations Manager – Child Placements and Resources, B1W, County Hall,
Taunton, TA1 4DY

Telephone: 01823 357869

Appendix 1

