



**Somerset
Council**

Fostering & Kinship Service Statement of Purpose 2026-2027



This Statement of Purpose sets out what services are provided for children living with Somerset foster carers and includes those provided by other agencies to support them.

The Statement of Purpose is available on the Somerset 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. This Statement of Purpose has been reviewed and updated in 2026 to reflect current legislation, statutory guidance and inspection requirements.

The statement is intended to provide a clear description of the services and is provided for the use of foster carers, children and families, members of staff, elected members, professionals in other agencies and members of the public.

Somerset Fostering and Kinship 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 role of foster care in improving the lives of children who need to be looked after. Foster carers 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 and Kinship Service will work in partnership with families, foster carers, colleagues and other agencies with the objective of delivering the best possible care and support to the children in our care.

2. Somerset Council's Vision

'Our shared vision is that Somerset's children and young people grow up in a safe, child friendly county that supports them to be happy, healthy and prepared for adulthood.'

Somerset Council's shared vision is underpinned by the *Somerset Children and Young People's Plan 2024–30*, which sets out six core commitments to children and young people.

The Council's commitment provides a clear and consistent set of values that guide our attitudes, behaviours and ways of working. These values define how we work together across services and with partners to achieve the best possible outcomes for children, young people and families.

'Somerset Children and Young People's Plan 2024-30' outlines the organisational values and commitments to children:

1. Having the best experience in education
2. Leading Healthy Lives
3. Good Mental Health and Wellbeing
4. Living in Safe Communities
5. Building Great Relationships
6. Well Prepared for Adulthood

We recognise that families, carers, friends, schools and wider communities have the greatest influence on children and young people's lives. We are committed to working alongside parents, carers and communities to strengthen these protective and nurturing relationships, enabling children and young people to thrive.

The number of children in care in Somerset during 2025/26 has ranged from 620 to 710.

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 (2023) and subsequent updates

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

Children's Social Care National Framework (2023)

4. Aims and Objectives

Our purpose and principles

Somerset's Fostering and Kinship Service is committed to providing stable, safe and nurturing family homes where children and young people can grow, thrive and experience a happy and fulfilled childhood.

We recognise that children come into care having experienced trauma and with diverse experiences, identities and needs. Every child is an individual, and our service is committed to responding flexibly, compassionately and proactively to support their emotional, physical, educational and social development from childhood into adulthood.

Central to our approach is the belief that strong, trusting relationships with consistent, caring adults make the greatest difference to children's lives. Foster carers are valued as skilled professionals and as core members of the team around the child, working in partnership with families, schools and other professionals.

Our work is underpinned by the national children's social care reform programme and a clear ambition to deliver high-quality, child-centred foster care that promotes permanence, stability and positive life chances.

Our aims

The Fostering and Kinship Service aims to ensure that:

- All children who come into foster care are cared for by adults who provide them with a safe, loving and stable home where they feel valued and belonging, listened to and supported to thrive.

- Children receive well-planned, high-quality care, preferably within their local communities, to promote continuity in education, health services, friendships and family networks.
- Children's wishes and feelings are actively sought, carefully considered and meaningfully reflected in decisions about their lives, in line with their age and understanding.
- Permanence is prioritised from the earliest point, and children who cannot safely remain at home are supported to achieve a permanent family-based arrangement as quickly as possible, informed by robust assessment and planning.
- Where children cannot remain with their parents, family and friends are actively considered and, where appropriate, assessed and supported to care for them, recognising the unique role kinship carers play in providing continuity, security and a sense of belonging.
- Siblings are enabled to live together wherever possible and appropriate, supported by thorough assessment of their individual and collective needs.
- Foster care homes are stable and carefully matched with individual children, and any changes are planned, thoughtful and undertaken only when in the best interests of the child.
- Fostering meets the individual needs of children in our care including through the provision of short breaks, long-term care and parent and child assessment foster care.

Supporting foster carers

We aim to recruit, retain and support a diverse range of foster carers who are skilled, compassionate and able to meet the needs of children and young people, including those with complex or additional needs. To achieve this, we are committed to:

- Maintaining a sufficient range of fostering households to enable choice, good matching and stability for children.
- Providing high-quality assessment, supervision, training and ongoing support for foster carers, delivered by experienced, skilled and qualified professionals.
- Offering a diverse range of support that reflects the breadth of foster carer roles and reflects their skills and experience.
- Renewing progression pathways that encourage foster carers to develop their skills, widen their experience and consider caring for a more diverse range of children with more complex needs.
- Supporting foster carers to exercise delegated authority appropriately, enabling children to experience a positive family life and childhood without unnecessary restrictions.
- To recognise that strong, trusting relationships between children and their foster carers are central to children's wellbeing, and to ensure foster carers are valued as key members of the team supporting each child or young person.

- Celebrating the role of foster carers and the impact they have on the lives of the children they care for

Promoting wellbeing, relationships and life chances

We work in partnership with children, foster carers, parents and wider family members, recognising the importance of maintaining and strengthening positive relationships wherever it is safe and appropriate to do so. The service is committed to:

- Promoting children's emotional, physical and mental health and wellbeing, supporting foster carers to meet health needs and build resilience and self-confidence.
- Supporting and nurturing children and young people to maintain meaningful relationships with parents, siblings, extended family and other significant people, where this is in their best interests.
- Supporting well planned re-connection and re-unification with family when this is in childrens best interests.
- Promoting educational achievement and aspiration for children in foster care, and supporting foster carers to work closely with schools, the Virtual School and other education providers.
- Enabling children and young people to enjoy ordinary childhood experiences, to have fun, develop their interests and talents, and build the skills they need for adult life.
- Celebrating the achievement of children and young people in our care.

Preparing for adulthood

We are committed to supporting young people as they move towards independence, ensuring they feel prepared, confident and supported. This includes:

- Supporting young people to remain with their foster families through "Staying Put" arrangements beyond their eighteenth birthday, where this is in their best interests and agreed.
- Working alongside young people to plan positively for adulthood, helping them to build independence skills while maintaining supportive and trusted relationships.
- Supporting young people to make and sustain relationships that will continue beyond their childhood and working in partnership with leaving care services to ensure a coordinated and supportive transition to adulthood.

Through these aims and objectives, Somerset's Fostering and Kinship Service seeks to ensure that every child in foster care experiences stability, belonging and opportunity, and is supported to achieve their full potential.

5. Management, Staffing and Service Structure

The Fostering and Kinship 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 Board.

The Corporate Parenting Board 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.

All Fostering and Kinship staff are appropriately qualified and experienced for the roles they fulfil. A robust suit of training supports their practice.

The Head of Service for Fostering and Kinship has overall responsibility for the management of the Fostering and Kinship Service.

The Strategic Operations Manager for Fostering and Kinship provides the Operational management of the service and acts as Nominated Officer for fostering and kinship services.

The Head of Service – Quality Assurance, and the Service Director – Children & Families are 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 Service Director – Children & Families for Children's services is the Nominated Officer for Fostering to Adopt.

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

The Fostering Panel Advisor role is undertaken by a suitably qualified professional overseen by The Head of Service – Quality Assurance.

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

6. Services Provided

The Fostering and Kinship Service undertakes the following functions:

- To recruit, assess and approve foster carers who can meet the diverse needs of children and young people and provide care that is safe, nurturing and trauma-informed.
- To provide foster carers with regular supervision, guidance and professional support, in line with the fostering national minimum standards, and best practice. To ensure they are well equipped and confident to meet children's emotional, developmental, cultural and identity needs.
- To provide a sufficient range of high-quality fostering households locally, enabling children to remain within their communities wherever possible and supporting siblings to live together when this is consistent with their assessed needs and care plans. This includes delivering specialist foster care that meets the diverse needs and stages of the children in our care and kinship carers.
- To develop and deliver a comprehensive foster carer learning and development programme, informed by children's experiences and delivered in collaboration with partner agencies, to continually strengthen carers' skills and practice.
- Suitable and appropriate matching of carers to meet individual children's needs
- To promote stability and continuity of care through early support, reflective practice and coordinated multi-agency responses that prioritise children's relationships, routines and sense of belonging.
- To identify emerging concerns and pressures at the earliest opportunity and, where required, to convene meetings that bring together carers, professionals and families to agree clear, coordinated plans focused on children's safety, wellbeing and progress.
- The allocation of supervising social workers to each approved foster family

Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team

The Recruitment and Assessment Team 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. Since 2024 this has been complimented by a regional offer through the South West Fostering Hub which provides a regionwide triage of initial enquiries from potential foster carers before forwarding them on the local authorised.

Somerset's Fostering and Kinship Service operates robust recruitment, assessment and approval processes to ensure that individuals approved as foster carers have the skills, experience, resilience and commitment required to provide safe, nurturing and high-quality care for children and young people. These processes are designed to safeguard children and to ensure that all fostering households support children's welfare, stability and development, enabling them to thrive and achieve their full potential.

East, West and Kinship Fostering Teams

There are three teams across the service who provide supervision and support to foster carers who are approved within the fostering and kinship service with one being dedicated to supporting kinship carers. Foster Carers supported by these teams provide short term care; intermediate and longer term care; link care roles for children in residential homes; short breaks and kinship care in accordance with their approval.

Short term foster carers look after a child or young person for a limited period of time in a planned and regular way or in response to need in their birth or fostering family.

Long term foster carers provide stability and settled care for a child or young person who has been long-term 'matched' with them. This is agreed by a permanence panel, who will consider the child's long-term needs and any additional support the fostering household might need over time. Long-term foster care offers children stability, security and a lasting family environment while supporting their ongoing connections.

Some long-term fostering arrangements progress to Special Guardianship through the courts which provides legal permanence to the child and parental responsibility to the carer and ends the child's looked after status.

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.

Mockingbird is a model of foster caring that brings together a group of local foster families into a supportive "constellation" around a central hub home. The hub carer provides planned and responsive peer support, respite, shared learning and social opportunities, helping foster carers build trusted relationships, reduce isolation and increase stability for children. By strengthening relationships, promoting a sense of belonging and responding early to pressures, Mockingbird helps children experience more consistent care and supports carers to continue fostering for longer.

Short break foster carers provide planned care for children with disabilities for shorter time-limited periods, such as one weekend per month or two evenings per week. This is designed to support families to continue caring for their children at home. The service promotes stability and continuity, enabling long-standing and trusted relationships to be built and maintained between carers, children and families.

Any of Somerset's approved foster carers who can offer time limited emergency fostering provision providing their approval offers the flexibility required for emergency fostering and they have the skills to provide care for children with limited time to plan and where there may be little information available. Emergency foster

care enables Somerset to provide children with time limited homes in foster families whilst assessments are undertaken to inform longer term plans for them.

The fostering teams are supported by family finders who focus on the identification of foster families for children who need them. The family finders work closely with the Home 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 up to 25 years if the young person is still in education.

Kinship or Connected Persons Foster care (Family and Friends Fostering):

Somerset is committed to children being cared for by people who already know and love them wherever this is possible and in their best interests. The child's social worker usually identifies these potential carers, along with their family, by exploring the family support network. The kinship assessment team provide support and information to inform decision making and assess potential kinship carers. Kinship foster carers have a supervising social worker and access to equivalent support and training to mainstream foster carers.

There is provision in law 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 (up to a further 8 weeks).

Outside of fostering, the Kinship support team, also supports special guardians and private fostering arrangements.

Family Assessment & Support Team (FA&ST)

FA&ST carers provide care to parent(s) and their child(ren) (0-5 years) together for time limited assessments or support. FA&ST foster carers 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. FA&ST provides independent parenting assessments of parents and also offers community-based assessments for children 0-5 years.

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 changes of carer they experience to a minimum.

Where the plan for the child is adoption Somerset works with Adopt SouthWest to identify 'foster to adopt' carers at the earliest possible point. This enables young children to move to carers who can become their adopters prior to final care plans being agreed. Somerset work in collaboration with Adopt Southwest, who assess, approve, and deliver the care and support for foster to adopt. The Fostering and Kinship Service provide information in respect of fostering, training, and process fostering payments as required.

Children's social workers

Every child looked after has an allocated social worker who holds responsibility for them and has a lead role as their corporate parent. The child's social worker leads on assessment, care planning and progression towards permanence, and provides ongoing support throughout the child's time in the care of Somerset Council.

The Fostering and Kinship Service works in close partnership with the child's social worker developing and maintaining effective team around the child approach so as to ensure that each child or young person's care plan is appropriately supported and their welfare is promoted.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO)

IROs are qualified and suitably experienced social workers who chair the statutory review meetings for 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 (2023) 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 and Kinship 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 Statutory Virtual School

The Statutory Virtual School, led by the Virtual School Head, promotes the educational achievement and progress of children and young people in care and supports their access to education, training and employment. There is a statutory requirement for every child looked after to have an up-to-date Personal Education Plan (PEP).

PEPs are reviewed termly through a formal process, and the Virtual School has strategic oversight of their quality, delivery and impact to ensure that educational needs are identified, addressed and sustained.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

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

Emotional Health and Wellbeing Team (EHWT)

The EHWT work are a multi-agency team jointly provided by CAMHS and Children's social care and work with looked after children and the system around them. Relationships are the most crucial part of recovery from developmental trauma and the team's approach is informed by attachment and trauma theories.

The EHWT provide support and training to foster carers, special guardians, and those working with children in care. They provide informal consultations, and clinical and therapeutically informed work with young people and their carers. They also offer more in-depth multiagency consultation and Psychological formulation regarding specific young people. The purpose of these team intervention is to develop a cohesive therapeutic network around the child that supports therapeutic care.

7. Recruitment, approval, training, support and review of foster carers

Recruitment of Foster Carers

The Kinship and Fostering and Kinship Service has staff dedicated to marketing and the recruitment of mainstream foster carers.

Since 2024 this has been complimented by a regional offer through the South West Fostering Hub which provides a regionwide triage of initial enquiries from potential foster carers before forwarding them on the local authority within 24 hours.

Workers within the team follow detailed guidance on the recruitment, assessment, and approval of foster carers. The process follows the requirements and timescales of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, Fostering National Minimum Standards, and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 and National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering.

Somerset have a dynamic recruitment strategy 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 which incorporates advertising, use of social media, informal meet ups and information sessions. Focused recruitment drives are put in place informed by the changing needs and demographics of the population of children in our care.

Information about fostering can be obtained from Somerset Council's website [Fostering in Somerset - Change a Child's Story](#) or the South West fostering Hub [Home - Fostering South West](#). The role of the South West hub will change as Regional Hubs are further developed in line with changes to national guidance aimed at recruiting more foster carers. Somerset will play an active role these changes and promote the needs of our children and carers

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 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 any initial enquiry an in-depth phone call takes place to explore what the enquirer may have to offer and to answer any questions they might have. If the decision made 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 and training package. This includes training that focuses on capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible and to meet the child's developmental needs. An experienced foster carer is assigned as their buddy to support them through the process.

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

Somerset aims to complete the assessment and approval process within 6 months.

At the end of the assessment applicants and their assessor will have explored the applicant's knowledge of childcare, their parenting skills, their support network, their ability to work in partnership with professionals and the families of children looked after and their commitment to learning and development. They will have identified the applicants' strengths and the kind of children they are most suited to caring for.

Pre-approval training

All prospective foster carers must attend a preparation course known as '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 their decision is to transfer. The Fostering Network transfer protocol is followed and the needs of any children who may already be cared for are paramount. Assessing Social workers undertake a fostering assessment and this is presented to Somerset's Fostering Panel for approval.

8. The Fostering Panel

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 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.

There are 3 Fostering Panels each month. Additional panels are arranged as required to avoid unnecessary delay.

9. Functions of the Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel has several functions:

1. To consider assessments of foster carers for approval and recommends 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, type of foster care.
2. To consider the first review of newly approved carers, every 3rd review and any subsequent reviews referred to it by the Fostering and Kinship Service. Make a recommendation about whether the carers remain suitable to act as foster carers, and if the terms of approval remain appropriate. Reviews should include the consideration of any complaints or allegations made against foster carers.
3. To consider reviews following an investigation and reviews where there have been Standards of Care enquiries within the year.
4. To consider service recommendations for changes in terms of approval or when there have been significant changes in foster carers circumstances (increase in approval and decrease in approval if to do with carers health/ capacity/ concerns).
5. To give advice and make recommendations on any other matters or cases referred to the panel by the Fostering and Kinship Service.
6. To Consider and make recommendations on temporary approvals of connected persons where these are referred to panel.

A Fostering Panel can only make recommendations 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 Council and makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Makers (ADM) who sit independent of the Fostering and Kinship Service management structure. They are responsible for decision making and the ratification of the panel's recommendations.

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 and Kinship 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 and Kinship Service must make enquiries and obtain any information which it considers necessary to review whether the foster carer and their household remain suitable. This will include feedback from children who have been lived 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 nor a significant change of approval 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 and Kinship Service may reach the decision that a particular carer is no longer suitable to foster, This may be for a variety of reasons and will be discussed with the carer, generally it will be because it is deemed that the foster carer is no longer suitable or capable of providing a safe and nurturing environment for the children in their care. 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 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 in their care.

10. Foster Carer Participation

Foster Carer's Consultative Group

The consultation 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 and Kinship 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 and Kinship Service.

Somerset's Foster Care Association

Somerset's Foster Care Association was launched in September 2015 and is an un-constituted 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 will develop further as part of the Fostering Next Steps programme.

11. Support to Foster Carers

Somerset Fostering and Kinship 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 achieving good outcomes for the children in our care.

Each fostering household has an allocated Supervising Social Worker who:

- Offers flexible support and supervision visits on a monthly basis.
- Liaises with the Home Team and advises on and supports matching between children and carers.
- Provides information about training and development and supports and encourages carers to attend training.
- Attends, supports and sometimes chairs, Support Meetings. These are held when fostering households are fragile and where additional support is required to support the child/children's care. They will also attend Children Looked After reviews as required and where children agree to this.
- Is responsible for ensuring all statutory checks are up to date.
- Undertake the foster carer's annual review.

- The Child's social worker takes a lead role in Placement Planning Meetings, with the supervising social worker (SSW) supporting.

The service also has a support team 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 from our website

www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk

Details of the various fostering schemes can be found on our website, however we have various types of fostering and associated fees and allowance 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 Mockingbird.

Types of fostering in Somerset:

- Step Forward Fostering
- Parent and Child Fostering (also known as Family Assessment and Support Team FA&ST)
- Short Break Care
- Children who attend Residential Education Provision
- Complex Medical Needs
- Staying Put
- Kinship and Connected Persons
- Link carers
- Mockingbird

Training

Somerset Fostering and Kinship 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 and 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.

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 and Kinship 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.

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

Fostering and Kinship Teams hold various support groups across their areas, and which are supported by senior social worker assistants and supervising social workers. The Family Assessment and Support Team (FA&ST) have their own groups which meet every two months. Foster carers also arrange informal support gatherings and coffee mornings.

The Fostering and Kinship Service arrange regular fun and celebratory events for foster carers, their children and the children they foster such as Christmas parties, Easter egg hunts and picnics on the beach.

The Fostering and Kinship 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 and Kinship 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 to provide practical advice and guidance and emotional support to carers during difficult times.

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 'working well' which can be accessed via WorkingWell@somerset.gov.uk

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 at [Complaints, comments and compliments](#)

- by email customerexperience@somerset.gov.uk
- by phone 0300 123 2224
- by writing to us at: Customer Experience Team; Somerset County Council;
- County Hall; Taunton; Somerset; TA1 4DY

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 and Kinship Service works to Somerset Council's Equality and Diversity and Inclusion Policy which is available on the Council's website [Equality and Diversity](#)

Somerset's Fostering and Kinship 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 identity or disability providing the Fostering and Kinship Service considers they can safely and appropriately meet the needs of children throughout their childhood and into independence.

The local authority will seek, wherever possible, to identify a fostering family that can meet a child or young person's assessed emotional and developmental needs, having regard to their individual circumstances, identity and background, including ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender identity and disability.

14. OFSTED

Ofsted is the independent inspectorate responsible for the regulation and inspection of fostering services in England. Local authority fostering services are inspected and regulated by Ofsted in accordance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and associated regulations and guidance.

All enquiries, concerns or complaints to Ofsted should be made via the Ofsted National Business Unit (NBU), which acts as the single point of contact. The NBU will manage and respond to enquiries or direct them to the appropriate team as required.

Contact details for Ofsted National Business Unit:

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

Telephone: 0300 123 1231

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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 Informationgovernance@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:

Lisa Walker
Strategic Operations Manager - Fostering & Kinship
lisa.walker@somerset.gov.uk

Appendix 1: Fostering & Kinship Team Structure

