

Revised Foster Carer's Progression Scheme

The Foster Carers' Progression Scheme enables Somerset to recruit and retain high quality foster carers to ensure that children and young people are looked after by foster carers who have the experience, skills and training necessary to meet their needs. It aims to ensure that children are placed with carers whose experiences and competencies meet those needs. The scheme recognises carers' skills, experience and professional learning and development. The scheme also provides a simple and equitable structure for making fee payments to foster carers.

This document details the payment levels linked to the progression levels, the specific tasks that are expected of the foster carer at each level and how foster carers can achieve progression.

Relevant Legislation and Guidance

- Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011 – Child-Focussed Standards
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 (amended)
- Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers
- Somerset County Council's Foster Carer's Handbook and Foster Carer's Agreement
- Somerset County Council's Training Programme for Foster Carers.

Key Principles

- To recognise and reward carers for their skills and experience, ensuring that they are valued
- To ensure that there are placements available to meet the specific needs of the children coming into care including increasing the number of carers able to offer placements to sibling groups and children with more complex needs.
- To be clear about the Local Authority's expectations of carers and the tasks they undertake;
- To provide carers with the training and learning opportunities to help them develop their skills and set out clear expectations in relation to this.
- To recognise the skills and experience of new carers, including those who are transferring from independent fostering agencies or from other local authorities.

Progressing through the Levels

One of the scheme's central principles is that the skills, experience and training of foster carers are recognised and properly regarded.

Approval at the different levels will depend on:

- The carer's assessed core skills at the time of approval and at each review;

- The carer's ability and willingness to undertake the agreed tasks.
- Their length of experience as an approved carer;
- The training that has been undertaken.
- The transferable skills and experience of new foster carers, and those who are transferring to Somerset County Council.

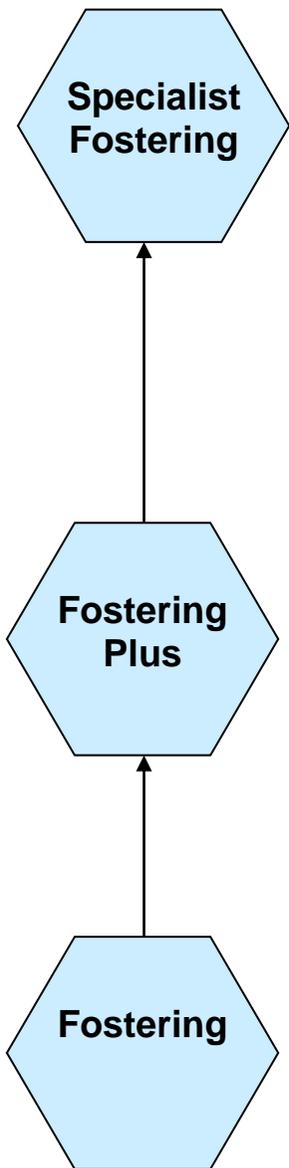
A carer will receive a payment linked to their level of approval whenever a child or young person is placed with them.

The scheme provides a clear "career pathway" for foster carers to progress if they wish to do so. Supporting carers to develop their knowledge and skills to progress is an integral part of their supervision. Progression is not guaranteed and a recommendation to progress can only be made if there is sufficient evidence that the requirements have been met.

Recommendation to progress must be presented to the Team Manager, and agreement gained from the Operations Manager. In respect of progression to Fostering Plus, a portfolio must be presented to the Staff Development Officer for quality assurance and feedback. Once this is completed and it is accepted as meeting the criteria, the portfolio will be sent to the relevant Team Manager and the Operations Manager for agreement to progress. The fostering panel will be notified of the progression by way of submitting the front sheet of the portfolio.

Fostering Plus will be reviewed at least annually as part of the fostering review process, and it is expected that foster carers are able to evidence meeting the criteria for continued approval.

It will be possible for carers to move down levels as well as up. If a carer wishes to retain their current level and have been unable to maintain certain competencies, an action plan will be agreed between the carer, their Supervising Social Worker, and Team Manager or Reviewing Officer and reviewed within 6 months.



Specialist Fostering

Therapeutic Foster Carer (TFC): £375
Family Assessment and Support Team (FA&ST) Parent and Child Fostering: £375
Single Placement Scheme and complex medical needs: £375

Allowances for children and adults in placement are paid in addition to the fees.

Fostering Plus (Waiting to be costed)

Allowance plus fee per child
*£175 fee – 1st child in placement
£225 fee – 2nd and 3rd child in placement

*If there is a need for a carer to be home based a fee of £225 will be paid.

Fostering

Allowance plus fee per child
£75 fee – 1st child in placement
£100 fee – 2nd and 3rd child in placement

Fostering

Carers can choose to be available on the Emergency Duty Team vacancy list and will receive a one off £50 payment if a placement is made.

Connected persons foster carers who look after a child related or known to them will usually remain at the Fostering level. Connected persons foster carers will only receive the fostering fee upon full approval at Fostering Panel. During their period of temporary approval they will receive the age related allowance for the child only.

Skills required for all those approved as foster carers for Somerset County Council

It is recognised that newly approved carers may be developing their ability to practice the whole range of skills identified below.

All foster carers are expected to meet the Child-Focussed National Minimum Standards for children.

Child Focussed

- An ability to provide a standard of care for other people's children which promotes their safety and welfare and protects them from abuse and other forms of significant harm.
- An ability to promote and support children's emotional and social development and to enable children to develop emotional resilience and positive self-esteem.
- An ability to provide a home which can comfortably accommodate all who live there to a suitable standard and where the child enjoys access to a range of activities which promotes their development.
- An ability to work closely with children's families, and others who are important to the child, in a respectful and supportive manner.
- An ability to provide an environment and culture which promotes, models and supports positive behaviour.
- An ability to listen and communicate with children appropriate to their age and understanding and communicate effectively with other professionals.
- An ability to support and encourage children to maintain family contact and friendships in accordance with their care plan.
- An ability to interact and engage with children using play.
- An ability to advocate on behalf of children.
- An understanding of the importance of education and an ability to act as a positive advocate promoting the child's education both inside and outside the home as they would for a birth child. This includes working closely with schools, attending parent's evenings and attending Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings.

- An ability to develop positive strategies for supporting children where they encounter discrimination or bullying wherever this occurs.
- An ability to support permanence planning for the child informed by observations and positively contribute to their life story and the work associated with this.
- A commitment and ability to support a child's cultural and identity needs.
- The commitment to work as part of the team around the child or young person and contribute to the department's planning for the child/young person.
- Maintains records as required when a child is in placement and contribute to written reports for a child's review and attend review meetings.
- Produce a child-friendly profile about their household for children coming into placement.
- At the end of a placement provide a letter to the child summarising their time with them and highlighting positive memories.
- Foster carers will normally be expected to give notice if a placement needs to end to avoid unplanned moves. The notice period is 28 days. Prior to reaching this stage it is an expectation that placement support meetings are held to ensure that appropriate support is offered to the child and carers to maintain the placement where possible and appropriate. Any decision to move a child should be based on the child's needs. If a placement needs to end we would want to work with, and support the foster carer to continue to care for the child until a planned move can be made.
- Offer up to 100 miles per week transport where required unless there are exceptional reasons why this is not possible, for example the carer does not drive, conflicting needs within the placement. Carers will continue to

claim mileage for this transport which is specific to and only for the fostered child's identified needs outside of normal family activity.

Own Development

- Demonstrate the commitment to utilise training and development opportunities and to improve skills as agreed in the individual Personal Development Plan.
- Complete the Training, Support & Development standards during their first year of approval whether they wish to progress through or not. This applies to all approved carers in the household.
- Successfully complete specified core training during the first year of approval:
 - First Aid;
 - Introduction to Child Protection;
 - Equality and Diversity;
 - Safer Care;
 - Introduction to Attachment.

Where two partners foster as a couple, one carer in the household must have completed all of the core training and the other must have completed First Aid, Safer Care and Introduction to Child Protection training as a minimum. For the second carer the child protection training could be an e-learning course. Both partners must also have undertaken

any training specified at the point of approval or subsequently through supervision or annual review by the supervising social worker.

Fostering Plus

To progress to this level foster carers will usually have a minimum of two years of experience and to have had their previous two reviews positively appraised by Fostering Panel and agreed by the agency decision-maker or by the Operations Manager – Child Placements & Resources. All of the requirements for Fostering continue to apply to Fostering Plus carers.

A foster carer may also be ready to progress to Fostering Plus either on assessment, upon transfer, or within the first year of their approval. They will need to demonstrate that they can evidence their skillset and experience and complete a portfolio to progress.

- Foster carer/s coming from another agency will require positive references; have previously completed the Fostering TSD Standards; have a range of transferrable skills; completed mandatory training; and will be able to evidence therapeutic parenting skills by giving clear examples. It is expected that foster carers will provide 2 positive annual reviews if they have been fostering for over 2 years with another fostering agency. They may or may not have children in place. They can then start the progression portfolio during the assessment/transfer period.

- During the assessment or within the first year they can evidence the existing criteria that is required for Fostering Plus as detailed in the progression scheme. For example, that they can work in partnership with other professionals or agencies; have a positive reference from previous employment or positive practice/child care examples; and have completed all relevant and mandatory training. They will also be able to evidence the additional expectations of Fostering Plus; working within the wider fostering service, i.e. being part of the FCA or consultative group; mentoring newly approved carers; and / or delivering training.
- A Foster carer wishing to progress during assessment or within the first year, who has completed the Diploma in Childcare, or equivalent training such as Youth Work or a Social Work qualification, can use this as evidence for the Fostering Plus portfolio.

Carers are expected to be part of the Emergency Duty Team carer availability list if they have a vacancy and will receive a £50 payment if a placement is made.

Short Break Care

Short Break carers care for children with a range of disabilities. Most Short Break carers will meet the requirements of Fostering Plus through the skills and experience that they have for this specific fostering task. Short Break carers are paid a proportionate allowance and fee for each night they care for a child. Further details regarding short break care can be provided by the short break care team manager.

Fostering Plus requirements

Foster carers progressing to fostering plus will need to evidence the following as part of their Fostering Plus portfolio, and continued approval onto the scheme.

- Demonstrate an ability to work closely with other professionals in carrying out individual therapeutic programmes, skills development, behaviour modification or educational programmes with children with appropriate supervision and consultation.
- Demonstrate an in-depth understanding of how poor attachments affect children's development and care for the child in a way that reflects this.
- Demonstrate skills in caring for sibling groups for example, managing competing needs, the different experiences children may have had despite being from the same family and their different responses.

- Demonstrate an ability to care for our most vulnerable children with more complex behaviours which contribute to professional assessments including court reports.
- Completed the Diploma in childcare or other relevant professional qualifications in working with children and young people e.g. social work, child care, teaching, youth and community work, probation or nursing. Alternatively, they can provide evidence which demonstrates their ability. This evidence could come from sources such as outcomes for children they have cared for, examples of multi-agency work they have done, annual review paperwork, testimonies and reports from children and professionals they have worked with, etc.
- Undertake a minimum of 6 relevant days training per year (main carer) with the second carer undertaking the equivalent of 2 days training.
- Demonstrate that they regularly access and contribute to the support network for foster carers.
- Demonstrate a willingness to be involved in staff and foster carer recruitment activity including road shows and information sessions, training and mentoring less experienced carers.
- Maintain fostering practice at this level evidenced via positive annual reviews.

Specialist Fostering

Carers who foster for one of the specialist schemes will be assessed and approved to meet the requirements of that scheme. Carers are expected to develop and maintain the specific skills required for their scheme in addition to demonstrating the skills required for Fostering and Fostering Plus.

All carers on these schemes are required to be home based.

Family Assessment and Support Team (FA&ST) **(Parent and child fostering)**

Foster carers on this scheme are able to provide a placement for parents and their young child. The role is one of support, advice, role modelling and assessment in close liaison with the child's social worker and their own supervising social worker. The foster carers may be expected to provide round the clock supervision and provide and present assessment information for the court. The observations made by parent and child foster carers will inform care planning decisions about whether a child may remain in the care of their birth parents.

Therapeutic Foster Care

Foster carers on this scheme are able to provide single placements to a child aged 3-12 within a therapeutic approach directed by the team manager. Children placed on this programme will have complex and challenging behaviours and may have experienced several placement breakdowns. The scheme requires the foster carer to be available for a number of meetings and interventions each week.

Single Placement

Foster carers on this scheme are able to provide single placements to children aged 10 or over. Children requiring placements on this scheme will have high level behavioural, learning, emotional and mental health needs. They are likely to be on the edge of requiring residential provision and will require a high level of support and supervision. They may have drug and alcohol issues, go missing regularly and be at risk of child sexual exploitation.

Children with Complex Medical Needs

These carers will foster children with complex medical needs who require nursing care and meet the criteria threshold for continuing health care funding.

Requirements

- At least one carer in the household must not ordinarily have any other paid/unpaid employment, and must be available for the care of the child if they are not in school.
- An ability to provide accurate records of their observations which contribute to assessment and planning for children.

Own Development

- Be active in developing and maintaining their skills through training and, where appropriate, will be willing to take on other activities such as supervising contact for children placed with other foster carers, support work, running support groups and helping with the training of new or other carers.
- Attend all carer meetings required by the scheme unless absence is agreed with the Team Manager.
- Undertake a minimum of 6 days relevant training per year (main carer) with the second carer undertaking the equivalent of 2 days training and any additional training required by the scheme.

- Provide evidence of the ability to work with individual therapeutic programme plans with other professionals for the benefit of children in their care.

Fee Retainer Payments

A fee retainer payment maybe payable in some circumstances, for example, at the end of a placement, while the foster carer is waiting for a placement, or when there is a planned transition for a child. When a placement ends the allowance for the child will cease however a fee retainer payment might continue to be paid providing the foster is available and able to take a further, suitable placement. Fee retainer payments are agreed on a case by case basis by the team manager. Fee retainer payments will be reviewed by the Supervising Social Worker and Team Manager every 2 weeks and will not continue indefinitely.

Holidays

Fostering, Fostering Plus, Single Placements and Children with Complex Medical Needs

Foster Carers are expected to care for a child as a member of their family and include the child in family holidays. Planned and agreed additional breaks from fostering, which meet the child's needs, can be agreed for up to 21 days

per year. During these periods the fee and allowance continues to be paid due to the need for the child's main carer to be able to provide for them throughout the year.

FA&ST and Therapeutic Foster Care

Up to six weeks break per year are available between placements. During this period only the fee is paid.

Significant illness or injury

If the child (or parent & child for FA&ST placements) cannot be cared for by the carers due to significant illness or injury the fee can be paid for up to 28 days. This will be subject to regular review by the supervising social worker and team manager. Allowances for the child are not paid during this time.

Complaints/Allegations

If a child is placed elsewhere whilst an investigation is carried out, carers will continue to receive the fee but not the allowance for the child until the investigation is concluded.

Summer Holiday Allowances

Carers should have the opportunity to request the child's summer allowance in full from 1st January each year in order to book a holiday that they are taking a child on in advance. If the child does not go on the holiday the payment will be reclaimed.

School Uniform

There are payments of £50 when a child starts primary school and £100 for transition to secondary school. If a child is received into care with inadequate uniform these additional payments may also apply, and can be adjusted to meet the needs of the child with agreement of the Operations Manager.

It is an expectation that a child moving placement has appropriate uniform and other clothing to take with them.