



Somerset Fostering Service

Statement of Purpose

2017 - 18

fostering
with somerset county council



Somerset County Council
Fostering Service
2017 – 2018

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.fosteradoptsomerset.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 transforming 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 2016 - 2020 and the Children and Young People's Plan 2013 - 2016 (CYPP) superseded by the recently approved CYPP 2016 - 2019 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 them to grow up in loving families and caring communities as the vast majority of our children do. 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 (CYPP 2016 – 2019).

The number of children in care in Somerset during 2015/16 and 2016/17 has averaged at 500.

3. Legislative and Policy Framework

- Children Act 1989
- Fostering: National Minimum Standards (2011)
- The Care Standards Act 2000
- The Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 & Amendments July 2013.

- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Volume 2; Care Planning, Placement and Case Review 2015
- Family & Friends Guidance (2010)
- Transition to Adulthood Guidance (2010) including Staying Put
- Independent Review of Determinations (Adoption & Fostering) regulations 2009
- The Children and Social Work Act 2017

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 reach their potential;
- 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 that 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 placements to allow choice and enable best matching.

The main aims of the service are:

1. To provide all children in foster care with a well-planned, high quality, local placement which can meet their needs and will enhance their life chances. All

children should experience a happy childhood, benefitting from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.

2. To achieve permanent placements in foster care for all children whose plan it is to remain in 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.
4. To recruit sufficient foster carers with the relevant skills and experience to offer placement choice, 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 and understanding and supports them to consider fostering more complex and harder to place children.
7. To take into account children'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.
9. To recognise and value the significance of maintaining positive relationships with birth parents, the wider family and other significant people.
10. To provide local placements to promote continuity of education and any other services provided and 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 placement stability and consistency of care. Placements 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 in order to develop their identity, self-confidence and self-worth.

14. To place siblings together, whenever possible, consistent with their assessed individual needs and informed by a sibling assessment.
15. To recognise and respond to the particular needs of disabled children and children with complex 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 'normal' and positive family life and childhood without unnecessary restrictions which impact on this.
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.
18. To support foster carers to promote the emotional and physical health 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, Foster Carers, 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 Strategic Manager for Child Placements and Resources has overall responsibility for the management of the Fostering Service and is the Responsible Individual.

Operations Managers for Resources provide the operational management of the service. The Operations Manager – Fostering is the Registered Manager of the service.

The Deputy Director for Children’s Services 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 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 Operations Managers for Resources and can be delegated to Team Managers. Business Support is provided from the Fostering Service.

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 including family and friends carers (connected persons);
- The provision of sufficient safe and aspirational foster placements locally for children looked after, keeping siblings together where assessed as the right plan;
- The delivery of specialist schemes to support children into their permanent placements swiftly and successfully;
- The promotion of placement stability and consistency of care.

Fostering and Adoption Recruitment Service (FARS)

FARS is responsible for the recruitment, training and assessment of all prospective foster carers to the point of approval by the Fostering Panel.

FARS also manages initial enquiries from prospective adopters.

Placements Team

This team provides the duty system which accepts all referrals for placements and then identifies appropriate placement options for those children and young people requiring a placement. The Placements Team is responsible for the initial matching of the needs of the child or young person with the strengths of the foster carers.

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

Where possible placements are identified with Somerset's own foster carers, however, in the absence of suitable provision in-house alternative placements are identified from the 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 a support service to mainstream foster carers. Foster Carers in these teams can provide short term or longer term, permanent foster placements in accordance with their approval.

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 permanent placement.

Long term foster carers provide permanent care for a child or young person. 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 placements end if a foster carer applies for and is granted a Special Guardianship Order in respect of the child they care for. This is a positive step as a child remains with their foster family but ceases 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.

The East and West Fostering Teams also have a family finding role focussed on the identification of permanent placements for children who remain in foster care. The family finders work closely with the Placements Team to explore all potential options.

Short Break Care

These foster carers provide placements for disabled children. The majority are cared for on a respite basis for time limited periods such as one weekend a month or two evenings per week. This is a county wide service managed within Fostering East.

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.

Family and Friends Fostering

Somerset is committed to placing children with family or friends with whom a child is already familiar rather than a foster carer 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 to make a placement with a relative or friend for up to sixteen weeks for a child who is looked after without the prior approval of the Fostering Panel via a viability assessment approved by a Strategic Manager. These placements must be assessed and presented to Fostering Panel within stipulated timescales.

Home Based Care (HBC)

This scheme provides placements for more complex children over the age of 10 who may not be accessing school successfully, may have emotional and mental issues, may be dependent on drugs and alcohol and may be involved in criminal activity and they may be at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). These placements can be short, intermediate or long term permanent and at least one carer in the household must be home based

Somerset has a limited facility within HBC to provide placements to young people remanded to their care whilst awaiting criminal proceedings.

Family Assessment & Support Team (FA&ST)

FA&ST carers provide placements to parents and their children (0 – 5 years) together for time limited assessments or support. These placements focus on 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 and providing assessment information. The FA&ST provides independent parenting assessments of those parents in placement and also offers community based assessments for children 0 – 5 years.

Treatment Foster Care (TFC)

This is an intensive fostering treatment programme for children with a history of abuse and neglect and multiple placement moves.

The TFC-P (Prevention) and C (Middle Childhood) programmes provide placements for 3 – 12 year olds.

TFC is nationally led but locally implemented. The programmes aim to enable a small number of children who have the most complex emotional, behavioural and developmental needs to be placed in a time limited placement where they will learn the skills needed to live in a family on a permanent basis, either returning to live with birth families or moving onto permanence through fostering and adoption.

In 2015 - 16 the service developed further in order to provide a wraparound programme (WRAP) for children where a permanent placement has been identified. This enables delivery of the programme in the child's adoptive or fostering placement avoiding an unnecessary placement move. This is an innovative use of the TFC programme and Somerset is at the forefront of this development nationally.

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

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.

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.

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 plans are implemented in a timely and appropriate fashion.

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.

Team 8

Provide targeted support which includes out of hours to children and young people on the edge of care or children whose placement may be at risk of breakdown.

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 has been targeted at foster carers who can care for children over the age of 10, sibling groups and children with complex needs. The plan for 2017/18 is to revert to a broader recruitment approach.

Information about fostering can be obtained from Somerset County Council's website and preliminary enquiries made with the Fostering Adoption and Recruitment Officers at www.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk and by telephone 01278 447860.

The Fostering and Adoption 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. Where the enquirer and FARS 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 applicants knowledge of child care, 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

FARS 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. FARS undertakes 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 appraisals 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 (Regulation 24).

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.

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 – see below.

Foster carers contribute to and are present at their reviews and receive confirmation in writing of the outcome of their review.

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. 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 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.

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 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. 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 in the first year have compiled a draft constitution and recently a buddy list of carers who can be contacted to support one another, if need be, independently.

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.
- Takes a lead role in Placement Planning Meetings.
- Takes a lead role in Placement Support Meetings where placements may be fragile and additional support is required.
- Attends Children Looked After reviews as required.
- 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.
- 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 We Care Too group.
- 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.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk.

Somerset has a progression scheme where payment is made according to skills and experience. Our current scheme has four payment levels. Levels 1 – 3 include an allowance for the child that covers the cost of caring for them and a payment for the foster carer. Level 4 payments are made to foster carers approved on the specialist schemes.

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 on line 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.

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. Foster carers have the opportunity to progress onto a City & Guilds Level 3 Award in Education and Training.

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

FA&ST and HBC have their own groups which meet every two months. The East and West Fostering Teams have more informal arrangements for carers to meet up.

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. A foster carer's reception is held each year and long service awards are presented to foster carers at this event.

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 birth 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 & Adoption Website
- Quarterly Newsletter
- Social events for carers and their children
- 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:

Email: somersetdirect@somerset.gov.uk

Online: www.somerset.gov.uk/telluswhatyouthink

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 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 placement 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.fosteradoptsomerset.org.

A copy can also be obtained from the Named Manager:

Jo Manning

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

Telephone: 01823 357869

