

# **Fostering Service**

## **Statement of Purpose**

January 2023

Review date: January 2024



time to care... Fostering North Somerset 

This Statement of Purpose sets out what services are provided for children who are placed with North Somerset's Fostering Service.

All references to 'foster carer' throughout this document includes all North Somerset registered foster carers, temporarily approved foster carers and supported lodgings carers.

This Statement of Purpose is endorsed by Sheila Smith, Director of children Services and Cllr Catherine Gibbons

## **1. Introduction**

This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirements of Standard 16 of the Fostering Services Minimum Standards 2011 and Chapter 4 of the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4. There is a requirement that each fostering agency produces a Statement of Purpose, setting out its aims and objectives, a description of the service it provides and the facilities that are provided. The Statement of Purpose should be reviewed and updated every year.

This Statement of Purpose is intended to provide information to:

- North Somerset registered foster carers, temporarily approved foster carers and supported lodgings providers.
- Prospective foster carers.
- Children placed with and the birth children of North Somerset Council foster carers.
- Any parent or person with parental responsibility.
- Children's Services staff who are involved in providing services to children and young people in care
- Children in Care Council
- Care Leaver Forum
- The Statement of Purpose is publicly available on the North Somerset Council website.

North Somerset Council Fostering Service is fully committed to meeting the requirements of:

- National Minimum Standards of Fostering Services 2011.

- Fostering Services Regulations 2011.
- National Care Standards Act 2000.
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 which amend the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 with respect to the assessment and approval of foster carers for looked after children.
- The Children and Families Act 2014 and the Training, Support and Development Induction Standards for Foster Care

The service recognises the central importance of foster care and foster carers for improving the lives of children who need to be looked after. Foster Carers should be provided with excellent preparation, training and support to carry out their role to maximum effect.

As a responsible Corporate Parent, North 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 Council, for example education, and other agencies with the objective of delivering the best possible care and support to children in foster care.

## **2. North Somerset Council's Vision**

North Somerset Children Service's Vision April 2021 and North Somerset's Practice Framework 2022 outline the organisational values that reflect the Council's vision for children and their families in North Somerset.

Our children's services vision is 'To make North Somerset a truly great place for children and young people to thrive; where all have the best possible life and opportunities, including those who are vulnerable, disadvantaged and/or have special educational or additional needs.'

We will ensure our children and young people are:

- happy, healthy and resilient
- safe and secure – physically and emotionally, in their relationships
- learning and achieving to the best of their potential and are ready for adult life

- confident that we are supporting their parents to identify and make changes to enable them to care for them and meet their needs
- supported to remain safely within their families and local communities wherever possible.

The number of children in care in North Somerset during 2022/23 has remained fairly steady at around 200-210.

### **3. Aims and Objectives**

North Somerset's fostering service is ambitious and aims to provide an outstanding service to all children and young people in foster care through the recruitment, training and support of local foster carers who can meet the needs of our children through childhood and into adulthood.

Our overall priorities for the fostering service are:

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

The main aims of the service are:

1. To provide all our children in foster care with well-planned, high-quality family care with local families which can meet their needs and will enhance their life experiences and improve their lives. All children should experience a happy childhood, receive excellent parenting, care, and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
2. To achieve permanent foster care for all children whose plan it is to remain in care.

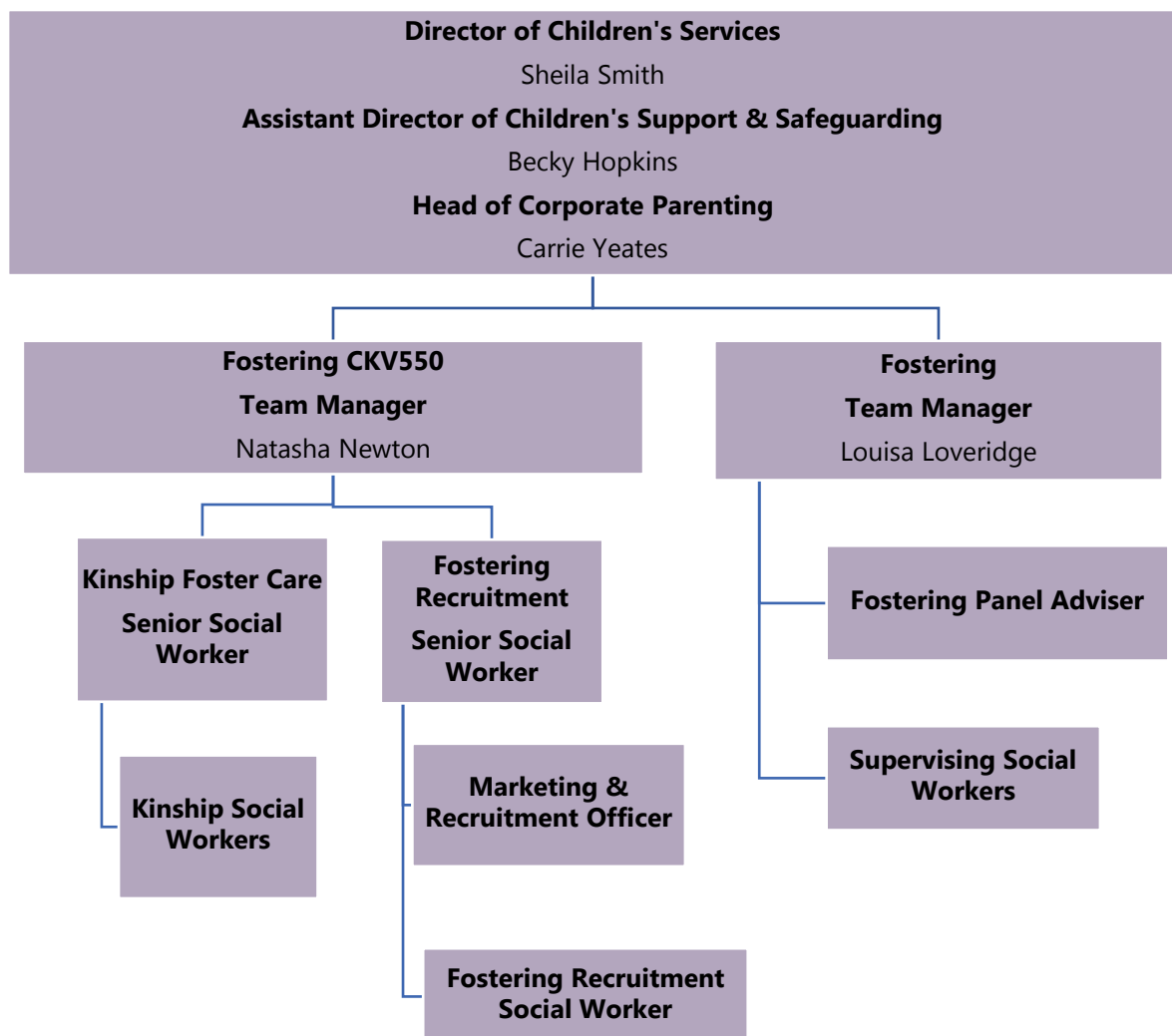
3. To recruit, prepare and assess sufficient foster carers with the relevant skills and experience to offer alternative family choices, good matching, and a settled home life.
4. To provide foster carers with high quality supervision, support, and training delivered by suitably experienced, skilled and qualified people.
5. To provide a skills pathway which supports foster carers to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding and enables them to care for children with more complex needs.
6. To value each child as an individual and ensure that the support given meets their individual needs and background, develops their identity, builds self-confidence and self-worth.
7. To listen to children and young people's wishes and feelings and encourage them to participate in decisions about their care.
8. To care for brothers and sisters together, whenever possible and consistent with their assessed individual needs and informed by a sibling assessment.
9. 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 or other significant adults in their lives.
10. To support foster carers to promote the emotional and physical health and wellbeing of children and young people.
11. To promote the educational achievements of children 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 respond to the complex or additional needs of children and young people. A series of short breaks to help the children remain within their own families will form part of this provision.
13. To use delegated authority to support children in foster care to have the opportunity to experience a positive family life and childhood without unnecessary restrictions.
14. To support young people to 'stay put' with their foster families beyond their eighteenth birthday where this is in the best interests of the young person and with the full agreement of the foster carers.

## 4. Management, Staffing and Service Structure

The Fostering Service is part of Children's Services under the overall leadership of the Director of Children's Services. The Director reports to the Chief Executive and also to the Corporate Parenting Board

The Corporate Parenting Board meet regularly to oversee care provided to children in care and those leaving care. It includes elected members, the Director of Children's Services, the Assistant Director, Head of Corporate Parenting, Head of Virtual School, Young Director, Foster Carer representatives, the Designated Nurse for Children in Care and young people.

### The staffing structure of the fostering service:



The Agency Decision Maker for the Fostering Service is the Principal Social Worker, Christian Sweeney.

There is an Independent Chair of the Fostering Panel which meets twice a month. Fostering Panel has a dedicated foster panel advisor who is independent from the children's social work teams.

## **5. Services Provided**

North Somerset fostering service is responsible for:

- The provision of sufficient local fostering families who are aspirational and provide high quality care for our children, keeping brothers and sisters together where this is assessed as the right plan.
- The recruitment and assessment of foster carers to meet the needs of children in care.
- The provision of training to foster carers to support and develop carers knowledge, skills, and experience.
- The allocation of a Supervising Social Worker to each approved and temporarily approved connected person foster family.
- The provision of regular support and supervision to foster carers in line with the fostering National Minimum Standards (NMS) and best practice.
- Foster carers' annual reviews where continuing support and development and suitability to continue fostering are considered.
- Identifying and matching of carers to meet individual children's needs.
- Providing a settled home life and consistent care for children and young people in care.

### North Somerset Recruitment

The fostering team is responsible for 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. There is information and advice about fostering for North Somerset on the fostering website.

#### Fostering Team Support and Supervision to foster carers

The fostering team provides support and supervision to foster carers who offer short, medium and long term (permanent) foster care to children in accordance with their fostering approval.

Short term foster carers care for a child or a young person for a limited period of time while arrangements are made for the child to return to their birth family or to an alternative fostering family or care provision.

Long term foster carers provide a permanent home for a child and young person who have been matched with them, after being presented to foster panel who consider and support this arrangement. Permanent foster care is a good outcome for some children where adoption is not appropriate, such as those who may be older and who have close links with their birth family.

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

#### Mockingbird Family Model Foster Carers

The Fostering Network's Mockingbird programme is a way of delivering foster care using an extended family model; North Somerset recruits, approves and supports Mockingbird carers who are linked with the child's primary foster carer to provide short breaks for the child, peer support, regular joint planning and training and social activities. These arrangements support and strengthen foster care for carers and children.

#### Respite Care

These foster carers provide care for children with disabilities. The majority of these children are cared for on a short break stay for time limited periods in accordance with their needs and support plan.

#### Specialist Fostering

The fostering team also supports foster carers who provide a home and care to children and young people with additional and complex needs.



### Emergency Duty Fostering

Any North Somerset foster carers who are in a position to offer time limited emergency fostering provision via 'on call' arrangements can offer this care (within their approval range) and if they are able to manage unplanned arrangements where there may be little information available. These arrangements can be made outside of usual office hours. Foster Carers are paid £50 per night to be on Emergency Duty Fostering.

### Supported Lodgings

Supported Lodgings carers offer a home to young people aged 16 – 21 who are ready to move on from foster or residential care and live more independently with carers who provide a less intensive level of care and support.

### Family and Friends Carers (connected persons foster carers)

North Somerset is committed to placing children with family or friends with whom a child is already familiar rather than with foster carers who the child does not know, wherever possible. The child's social worker usually identifies these carers by finding out about the child's support network.

Family and Friends Foster Carers are known as 'Connected Persons'. There is provision for children to live with a relative or friend for up to sixteen weeks without the prior approval of the Fostering Panel. Temporary approval is agreed via a Regulation 24 assessment undertaken by the child's Social Worker. This arrangement is approved by the ADM for fostering. These arrangements must be assessed and presented to Fostering Panel within 16 weeks, unless an extension is granted under regulation 25, for up to a further 8 weeks. Outside of fostering, the Kinship Service (part of the fostering team), also supports special guardians and the children they care for and completes assessments and reviews Private Fostering arrangements.

### Fostering for Adoption and Adoption West

North Somerset is committed to planning for children in a way that achieves permanence as quickly as possible. Where the child has a plan for adoption North Somerset is developing its fostering for adoption practice to enable young children to be placed with approved adopters who are temporarily approved as North Somerset foster carers prior to final care plans being agreed. North Somerset works in partnership with the regional adoption agency Adoption West who assess, approve, and deliver the care and support for foster to adopt carers; the North Somerset fostering service provides information to the temporarily approved foster

carers, a copy of the foster carers handbook and process payments as required along with access to training.

#### Family Support & Safeguarding Team & Children in Care Team

Each child in care has an allocated social worker who is responsible for that child or young person. The child's social worker takes the lead on assessing the child's needs, care planning to permanence and supporting the child whilst in the care of North Somerset Council. The fostering team work closely and in partnership with both the Family Support & Safeguarding Teams and the Children in Care team to support and achieve the child/young person's care plan.

#### Independent Reviewing Officers

Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) IRO's are qualified and suitably experienced Social Workers who chair the reviews of children in care after, confirm their care plans and ensure that the plans are implemented in a timely and appropriate manner.

#### Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

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

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

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

#### Medical Advisor

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

#### The Designated Nurse for Children Looked After

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

#### North 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 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 provide specialist mental health services for children and young people looked after.

## **6. Functions of the Fostering Service Pre Foster Care Approval**

#### Recruitment of Foster Carers

A sufficiency and recruitment strategy is in place that supports the recruitment of a sufficient number and range of local foster carers to meet the needs of North Somerset's children in care. This is reviewed annually and delivers a recruitment campaign for all types of fostering.

Information about fostering can be obtained from the North Somerset Fostering website and preliminary enquiries made.

The North Somerset website contains information on fostering and contact numbers for the team.

North Somerset Foster Carers support with recruitment by attending events and promoting fostering in North Somerset.

Following the initial enquiry there will be a visit by a social worker to complete an initial home assessment.

#### Assessment of Foster carers

Prospective carers are well prepared for the fostering task through preapproval training and an assessment of suitability.

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

The fostering assessment should be completed within 6 months. At the end of the process the assessment will have explored the prospective carers knowledge of childcare, assessed general parenting skills, their ability to work in partnership with professionals and the families of children in care and their commitment to learning and development.

### Pre Approval Training

All prospective foster carers must attend a preparation course known as the Skills to Foster (STF); STF is delivered by social workers and experienced foster carers. STF also includes additional information delivered by a care experienced young person, health and educational professionals.

STF is held over three days and the following topics are covered:

- What do Foster Carers do?
- Who are the Children and Young People?
- Working together
- Health and health promotion
- Education and Health
- Safer Caring
- Understanding behaviour
- Moving on

Where a couple are being assessed both applicants are expected to attend.

### Transfer of Foster Carers from another fostering agency

North Somerset supports carers to transfer from other agencies and follows the Fostering Network transfer protocol.

## **7. Functions of the Fostering Panel (pre and post approval)**

North Somerset has one fostering panel which meets twice a month.

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.

The Fostering Panel has a number of functions:

- 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.
- 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.
- To recommend progression through the skills levels.
- To oversee the quality of assessments carried out by the Fostering Service.
- To give advice and make recommendations on any other matters or cases referred to the panel by the Fostering Service.
- To monitor the out of approval and temporary connected persons arrangements made by the Fostering Service.
- To approve and review Supported Lodgings providers.

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

Fostering Panel provides a key quality assurance function for North Somerset Council and makes recommendations to the ADM who is independent of the Fostering Service management structure. They are responsible for the ratification of foster 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.

#### Prospective Foster Carer Approvals

Applicants are strongly encouraged to attend Fostering Panel with the Social Worker who has undertaken their assessment. Panel members understand the applicants can be apprehensive about attending and so they do all they can to put applicants at their ease. The Panel Chair will meet with applicants before they join the meeting and offer them the opportunity to hear the questions Panel are going to ask. Questions are related to their application and the assessment. The Fostering Service maintains a register of people who have been approved as Foster Carers. Records are also maintained on those not approved.

#### Annual Reviews of Approval

All approved Foster Carers are reviewed annually (Regulation 28).

When undertaking an annual review, the Fostering Service must make enquiries and obtain which it considers necessary to review whether the Foster Carer and their household remains suitable. This will include feedback from children who have been placed with the Foster Carer, birth family members and the child's Social Worker and IRO .

First annual reviews, then carers reviews every third year and 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.

### Termination of Approval

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

The Fostering Service may reach the decision that a particular carer is no longer suitable to foster and this may be due to serious concerns about the standard of care provided. In these circumstances, Foster Carers can be provided with independent advice and support from a worker employed by The Fostering Network (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 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.

## **8. Functions of the Fostering Service post approval:**

### Support to Foster Carers

North 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 to foster carers is crucial to a successful home life.

Each fostering household has an allocated Supervising Social Worker who:

- Offers support and supervision visits.

- Liaises with the Children's Placements Team and advises on and supports placement matching.
- Provides information about training and development and supports and encourages carers to attend training.
- The child's social worker takes a lead role in Placement Planning Meetings, with the Supervising Social Worker (SSW) supporting.
- Attends, supports and sometimes chairs Placement Support Meetings. These are identified and held where placements may be fragile and where additional support is required.
- Attends, supports and sometimes chairs Placement disruption meetings. These are identified where notice has been given by a Foster Carer.
- Will attend children in care reviews as required and asked to do so to support the fostering family and children.
- Is responsible for ensuring all statutory checks are up to date.
- Undertakes the Foster Carer's annual review.

The Service also offers:

Foster carers and children in care the opportunity to receive consistent support from a Mockingbird hub.

A wide range of targeted support groups eg Foundations for Attachment; Nurturing Attachments

Support from CONSULT – a team comprising a specialist social worker, clinical psychologist and family support workers who work with foster carers to help them develop a range of responses to children and young people affected by trauma.

### Payments

All approved foster carers receive an allowance and a skills payment for the child they are caring for.



Temporarily approved foster carers receive an allowance for each 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.

North Somerset makes skills payments to all its foster carers and carers can progress through the skills levels as they build up their experience and complete training.

### Training

North Somerset Fostering Service recognises that fostering can be a demanding and complex task. We are committed to providing good quality training that is accessible and relevant to all foster carers.

Foster Carers also have the benefit of being able to access any appropriate training available to North Somerset Council employees.

In line with North Somerset's skills 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.

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.

Foster Carers are encouraged and supported to take responsibility for their own professional development.

### Out of hours support

Out of hours support is available from the Emergency Duty Team.

North Somerset foster carers have 24 hour telephone access to trained counsellors as part of the Fostering Network membership.

Foster Carers in Mockingbird Constellations have support from the Mockingbird Hub Home carers.

### Other support provided to Foster Carers:

## Foster Carers Handbook

Free Fostering Network membership, including access to events, information and advice, and a number of discounts.

Fostering Network counsellors can also provide guidance on a range of issues including finance and legal matters.

A 'leisure key' card that provides free, unlimited access to all North Somerset Council leisure facilities and schemes

Foster carer coffee mornings, social events and children's activities including summer outings.

### **9. Foster Carer Participation**

Membership of North Somerset Foster Carer collective. This is open to all carers and is run and organised by a group of Foster Carers. Members of the collective have the opportunity to meet with the Team Manager, Head of Service and Assistant Director to offer feedback on what is working well and areas for improvement. The collective also supports North Somerset Fostering in organising of events for children and young people.

### **10. Complaints**

All complaints by Foster Carers are taken seriously. Foster Carers are able to use North Somerset 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 Head of Corporate Parenting or use the complaints procedure by contacting:

Complaints and Customer Services. Tel: 01275 882171 or email [complaints.manager@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:complaints.manager@n-somerset.gov.uk)

Or write to:

North Somerset Council, Complaints Manager, Town Hall, Walliscote Grove Road, Weston-Super-Mare, BS23 1UJ

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. The allegations policy sets out the process for investigations into complaints and allegations and the Head of Service for Corporate Parenting will inform Ofsted in individual cases where required. North Somerset Council maintains a record of all complaints and allegations made against Foster Carers and their outcomes.

## **11. Equal Opportunities**

North Somerset's Fostering Service works to the North Somerset Council's Equality and Diversity Policy which is available on the council website. The Fostering Service will treat all service users fairly, openly and with respect throughout the fostering process. Applicants wishing to be approved as Foster Carers will be considered irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability providing the fostering service considers they can safely and appropriately meet the needs of children throughout their childhood and into independence. Every attempt will be made to find a fostering family which meets a child or young person's emotional and developmental needs taking into consideration their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability.

## **12. 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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk) or at the following address:

Ofsted National Business Unit

St Ann's Square

Manchester,

M2 7LA

## **13. Further Information**

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually.

The Statement of Purpose, Foster Carer's Handbook is available on the service website [www.n-somerset.gov.uk](http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk)

A copy can also be obtained from the Head of Corporate Parenting:

Carrie Yeates

**Email** – [Carrie.yeates@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:Carrie.yeates@n-somerset.gov.uk)

**Tel:** 07799075780

**Office/Post:** Town Hall, Walliscote Grove Road, Weston-Super-Mare, BS23 1UJ