Specialist ‘Linked-Foster Carer Scheme’

Operations Manager - Fostering

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# Introduction and Purpose

The ‘Linked-Foster Carer Scheme’, is designed to enable Somerset to recruit and retain high quality foster carers and work with existing internal foster carers who have experience and skills to meet the needs of children within the service.

# Scope of Policy

The Scheme is designed specifically for the support and care of children from residential settings, whereby the care-plan is to step-down to a family environment/into fostering. It is designed around a family model of care, where natural relationships can be built, supported and sustained. The scheme requires Linked-Foster Carers to be an integral part of a child’s life, and in many respects simulating a close relative or natural family friend who has a vested interest into a child’s life, development, wellbeing, and progression.

# Linked Foster Carers

Linked- Foster Carers will:

* Work with social workers, residential staff, and other professionals to plan, review and adapt plans for good transitions for children from residential settings.
* Work to offer a natural family environment for children, helping children to adjust to family life and to prepare children for long term fostering.
* Work in conjunction with EHWT and the family finders service to tailor support and transition plans for children.
* Be a key person/people in working with children to transition into well-matched fostering homes.
* Will remain closely linked to the child’s long-term foster carer, offering support, advice, and overnight stays when needed and agreed.
* Be active in the child’s life, as a natural extended family member. Link-Foster Carers will remain to be a ‘significant adults’ in the child’s life, and offer support as long as this is needed.

Linked-Foster Carers are expected to

* Work with other professionals in areas of risk management, safer care, and transition planning.
* Be resilient and able to manage complex behaviour, having experience and strategies in a wide range of areas.
* Meet with residential staff members and children both in residential setting and in the community.
* Liaise with schools and health professionals, acting as an advocate when and where needed.
* Support children with activities; meet for meals; support and develop children’s interests; communicate by email/letter/phone calls; and offer children regular and planned overnight stays.

The Shared-Foster Carer Scheme is focused around 3 main areas:

1. **Building** - natural relationships;
2. **Developing** - children’s understanding of positive family environments;
3. **Preparing** - children to move to long term well matched permanent placements

It is anticipated that carers will work with between 1-4 children. However, determining factors such as complexity of a child’s needs; location; space, and time commitment will be taken into consideration when determining linked care numbers.

# 4. 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.

# 5.Skills Required for the Linked-Foster Carer Scheme

* 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, main foster carer, 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 (when agreed).
* 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 stays over and contribute to written reports for a child’s review and attend review meetings.
* Produce a child-friendly profile about their household for children.
* Be able to 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 an ability to care for our most vulnerable children with more complex behaviours which contribute to professional assessments.

Foster carers will normally be expected to give notice when they are unable to support a child as a Linked- Foster Carer. 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 Linked-foster care where possible and appropriate. Any decision should be based on the child’s needs. If the linked-foster carer needs to end their involvement, we would want to work with foster carers to continue to care for the child until arrangements can be made in the best intertest of the child.

It is expected due to the level of experience and skills required many Fostering Plus Carers would be suitable to participate in the Linked-Foster Carer Scheme. However, there may also be other foster carers that are able to offer suitable care, and who have a level of experience and knowledge to be able to participate in the scheme. It is also important that matching with shared foster-carers is well considered and thought out, and how carers can meet individual needs.

Where it is felt that a foster carer meets the criteria and could be suitable for the scheme, a recommendation can be raised by the supervising social worker for consideration to be paid an enhanced rate equal to the fostering plus rate (for overnight stays/respite). This needs to be presented to the Operations Manager for consideration and will need to clearly detail the foster carers skills and experience, and how they can meet an individual child’s needs.

# 6. Fees and allowances

**Linked-Foster Carer Scheme**

Fee retainer (per child) £100

+

Half/full day-care rate

(Foster Carers will be paid a fostering half day/day rate, when working with children either in or away from their homes, or in the community)

or

Fostering Plus or Foster Carer rates

(pro-rata/respite rates for every night a child stays over)

Mileage will be claimable when travelling to meet children, or in connection with the Childrens welfare and care-plan as detailed in the fostering fees and allowances policy.

# 7. Day Care Rates

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| No continuous nights in placements |
| Child’s Age | FosteringPlus Full day | FosteringPlus ½ day | Full Day | ½ day |
| 0-4 year old | £52.65 | £26.33 | £31.22 | £15.61 |
| 5-10 year old | £55.51 | £27.76 | £34.08 | £17.04 |
| 11-15 year old | £61.23 | £30.62 | £39.80 | £19.90 |
| 16-18 year old | £67.52 | £33.76 | £46.10 | £23.05 |