

North Somerset Council Permanence Policy Statement

Purpose: North Somerset Council is committed to achieving the stability and security of permanence for every child in its care. Wherever possible we will keep children and young people safe at home, within their families. When children do need to come into our care, we will work to ensure that they remain within their communities and connected to their networks. We will ensure that these children are cared for in a foster family unless their needs cannot be met in a family home. We are committed to preventing children living far away from home and/or experiencing multiple moves.

This policy underlines that commitment and clarifies the different routes to permanence which may be followed to achieve the best possible outcome for each individual child.

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1. Overarching Statement:

This Permanence Policy Statement relates specifically to children in the care of North Somerset Council.

- We recognise and are committed to upholding the rights and freedoms of the European Convention on Human Rights which are given effect in UK law by the Human Rights Act 1998 and the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The following policy statement is set in the context of these principles and provisions.
- We are committed to acting as a good 'Corporate Parent' to enable all children in care with North Somerset Council to achieve their full potential in life.
- We recognise that all children have the right to family life which offers them permanence and that, where consistent with their welfare, this should be within their birth family or with a 'connected person' as defined by the Care Planning Regulations 2010.¹
- We define permanence as the framework of legal, physical, and emotional permanence which gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity throughout childhood and into adulthood and believe this is achieved by the provision of consistent care, stable relationships and a secure family base in life.
- We recognise that delay in planning and implementing plans for permanence is detrimental to good outcomes for children.
- We recognise placement moves prior to permanence are detrimental to good outcomes and unnecessary moves should be avoided.
- We believe every child should reach their full potential and that they are best supported to grow and achieve within their own families.
- Where children are separated from their birth families every effort will be made to re-unite them where it is safe and consistent with their welfare.
- Where this cannot be achieved within timescales which meet the child's needs and a decision is taken that a child cannot return to the care of their birth family, we will consider all other options which will promote permanence.
- Family network meetings are recognised as an important tool in identifying support and care options within the extended family, a genogram will be

completed within the first 3 visits to any family and a family network held as soon as possible after an assessment of need has been completed.

- Decisions about achieving permanence must consider the wishes and feelings of children and young people, their birth parents, and families.
- Where the wishes of a child are not followed the reasons will be clearly recorded and explained to the child.
- Our professional knowledge highlights the critical importance of children maintaining links with their birth family where possible. Plans for the child to see their family which enable such links to be sustained and are appropriate to the chosen permanence option will be developed and supported.
- We recognise the legal duty to give preference to a permanent home with family or friends unless that would not be the most appropriate home for a child. ²
- We are committed to offering a range of support services to meet the assessed needs of children in permanent homes and their carers, whatever their legal status.
- All arrangements will be made following a clear plan which will include introductions to the home.
- North Somerset Council considers the routes to permanence for children separated from their birth families are:
 - Going Home (Reunification)
 - Family and Friends Care
 - Special Guardianship / Child Arrangement Orders ³
 - Permanent Foster Care
 - Adoption including early permanence placements ⁴
- In each case the decision about the most appropriate route to permanence for the child will be based on a thorough assessment of the child, the parenting capacity of any prospective carers and will take account of relevant research findings.
- For the purposes of this policy statement residential care is not included as a permanence option as it does not provide a secure family base into adult life. We recognise that for a small number of children their needs can only be met for a specific time within a residential home.

¹ Care Planning Placement & Case Review Regulations & Statutory Guidance 2010

² Children Act 1989 section 22c (7)

³ Child Arrangement Orders are not specifically addressed in this policy. We have included them here as it is recognised that in some cases CAO may be the preferred legal option to Special Guardianship and are used in private proceedings.

⁴ The Children and Families Act 2014 imposes a duty to consider placements with carers who are approved as both adopters and foster carers.

2. Concurrent Planning (twin tracking)

- We are committed to making sure children find their permanent family as quickly as possible. To do so we actively explore and progress all appropriate permanence options concurrently to avoid unnecessary delay for children.
- These options are considered at each child in care review as part of the child's plan, at Permanence Planning Meetings, through Permanence Tracking Panel and overseen by Care and Resource Panel.
- All potential permanence options under consideration must be shared with parents from the outset.

3. Siblings

- We are committed to keeping brothers and sisters together wherever possible and where it is in their best interests.
- Where brothers and sisters do not live together, we will promote positive relationships and have arrangements in place so they can continue to see each other.

4. Going Home

- We are committed to children returning home as a permanence option. The decision for children to return home will be made following a child centred multi agency assessment and will take account a of relevant research findings.
- We recognise robust analytical assessments are required which re-assess the original risks together with the parental capacity to change and which build on family strengths.

5. Family and Friends Care (Kinship carers)

- We define family and friends care for a child in care as the placement of a child with family members or other significant adults (connected persons) who have an established relationship with the child.
- We have a dedicated kinship service to assess and support kinship carers.
- Family and friends care can be provided in a variety of ways. It would be expected that the carer would make an application for a Special Guardianship Order, Child Arrangement Order, or an Adoption Order to enable the child to leave care. On occasion children remain in care with a long term 'connected persons' foster carer.
- If we need to assume care for a child in an emergency, we can assess a relative or friend as a temporary foster carer under Regulation 24 ¹; this will only be used in exceptional circumstances and must be agreed by the Head of Corporate Parenting prior to the child being placed.
- Supporting children to live with their extended family or friends can provide good outcomes for children. We recognise it is our legal duty to consider this as our first option however it must always be consistent with the child's needs.
- We recognise good assessment, preparation and support are crucial to the success of a family and friends' arrangement. Assessments must evidence that carers have the capacity to meet the child's changing needs and provide a settled and safe home into adulthood.

¹ Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010

6. Special Guardianship

- We are committed to promoting special guardianship as a permanence option for children placed with either family and friends' carers or unrelated foster carers. Special guardianship means that a child will leave care and the Special Guardianship Order provides legal permanence for children and a family life.
 - We know there are children living with unrelated foster carers who may benefit from their becoming their special guardians. Information and advice will be made available to those carers to enable them to make an informed choice about whether this is an option they wish to pursue.
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7. Permanent Foster Care

- We are committed to supporting foster carers to offer long-term permanence where this is in the best interests of the child. We believe that long-term fostering can provide a secure family base for children and can meet their needs throughout childhood and into adulthood through use of a Staying Put arrangement. This way of achieving permanence is most likely to be used for older children who may already have a sense of family identity. Other forms of permanence are more likely to be the preferred option for children under 6.
- The decision that long-term fostering is the preferred option for the child will be taken initially at a Permanence Planning Meeting and confirmed at the child in care review.
- An assessment of the foster carer's capacity to offer permanence will be undertaken by North Somerset's Fostering Team or the Independent Fostering Agency.
- Children who achieve permanence through long-term fostering remain in the care of North Somerset Council and subject to statutory visits, reviews, health assessments and personal education plans. What decisions the foster carers can take about the child's day to day life will be agreed by Delegated Authority (see Delegated Authority Guidance North Somerset Procedures Manual).
- The formal recognition of the foster carer's commitment to provide a permanent home for the child is considered by the Head of Corporate Parenting and ratified by the Fostering Panel and Agency Decision maker.

8. Adoption

- We are committed to adoption as a permanence option which should be considered for all children. Adoption offers a child legal permanence and a family for life.
 - We recognise that delays in adoption planning and progressing a permanence plan for adoption can have a severe impact on the emotional health and development of children and the likelihood of a successful adoption.
 - Where the child is unlikely to be able to live safely with their parents and there is no-one who can care for them in the family and friends' network, we fulfil our duty to actively plan for Early Permanence. We are committed to placing children in an Early Permanence arrangement where it is in the child's best interests. The circumstances where an Early Permanence arrangement is
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likely to be appropriate is set out in the Coram guidance 'THE ROLE OF FOSTERING FOR ADOPTION IN ACHIEVING EARLY PERMANENCE FOR CHILDREN' (see references below).

- We recognise the support and services adoptive families require, and through our regional adoption agency Adoption West, we provide high-quality adoption support services. Every child has an adoption support plan at the time the match is presented to adoption panel.
- Adoption West undertake a post adoption support assessment of need. North Somerset Council retains responsibility for continuing financial support and considering new requests for financial support. We are committed to fulfilling our financial responsibilities.

Appendices: Practice guidance

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1095/reunification-practice-framework-guidance.pdf>

References

The Role of Fostering for Adoption in Achieving Early Permanence for Children.
Elaine Dibben and Viv Howarth. www.corambaaf.org.uk 2017