

Approval of Foster Carers Somerset Council Fostering Service

Operations Manager - Fostering

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1. Guiding Principles

Somerset Council is committed to the following principles in relation to terms of approval of foster carers:

- Positive outcomes for children are more likely when the skills, experience, knowledge, and competencies of foster carers are well matched with the needs of children.
- The terms of approval of foster carers remains a significant requirement in defining the children that foster carers can be expected to care for. The terms of approval should cover only those proposed children that a carer can realistically accept. Considerations should include (but are not limited to): family dynamics; skills and experience; household environment; support networks and mechanisms; and the ability to demonstrate knowledge and implementation of therapeutic parenting models and practices.

- Somerset Council is committed to caring for children and ensuring their needs are met, and for foster carers to not be placed under any pressure to take children beyond their skills, knowledge, experience, and competence.
- The preferences of foster carers will be respected in all potential matching processes.
- Terms of approval should not be set in a restrictive way, that prevents foster carers caring for children with different needs. For example, a child's chronological age may not say very much about the child's functioning or how their needs can be met by foster carers.
- Terms of approval and preferences need to be agreed in close consultation and collaboration with approved and prospective foster carers.
- Somerset Council believes in good practice. Where a foster carer review recommends significant amendment to the terms of approval, the review will be considered by the fostering panel, rather than decided upon by the Operational Manager (nominated person) or Agency Decision maker; for example, in relation to taking on a new type of fostering where specialist skills are required. Judging whether a proposed change to approval terms is sufficiently significant to warrant fostering panel consideration will fall within the discretion of the Operations Manager for fostering in their capacity as the nominated person, in consultation with the panel advisor when required.

2. Defining Appropriate Terms of Approval

- Somerset Council Fostering Service will hold a degree of autonomy and flexibility in respect of approval terms and will not have a blanket approach to approving foster carers in general. However, it is important to clarify how best to determine the most appropriate terms of approval.
- Somerset Council Fostering Service will make judgements in respect of terms of approval by taking a balanced approach to its decision making.
- The approach to be taken by Somerset Council Fostering Service can be summarised as follows:

1. Somerset Council Fostering Service will seek to approve all new carers with a wide age range, either 0 to 18 or 5 to 18 (if the foster carer's bedroom is situated on a different floor, or/and the foster carer smokes or vapes), unless there is good reason to make the approval terms narrower.
 2. All foster carers can indicate a 'preferential age-range' which can be stated under preferences within their approval.
 3. Age preference parameters should be a minimum of 5 years wherever possible. For example – 'Approved 0 to 18 years', with 'preferential age of 0 to 10 years'. Unless there is good reason to make the approval terms narrower.
- The number of spare bedrooms that are available for fostering, will contribute towards the carer's approval numbers for children (i.e. the Fostering Service will seek to approve foster carers based on the foster carer's household capacity), with up to a maximum of three children as follows:

Room size	Approval
One single bedroom	One child/young person
Two single bedrooms	Two children/young people
Three single bedrooms	Three children
One double bedroom	One child, or two children if siblings (where the room has capacity for 2 single beds and appropriate furniture).
Two Double bedrooms	Two or three children if siblings (where one of the bedrooms has capacity for 2 single beds and appropriate furniture)
Three Double bedrooms	Three children

Although Somerset Council Fostering Service will seek to approve the number of children that a foster carer can care for as set out above, approval should not include

children that the foster carer is not suitable to care for. However, equally, approval terms should not be unnecessarily restricted to exclude children that the carer would be suitable to foster. In all cases a foster carer may not foster more than 3 children (the usual fostering limit), unless they are siblings, without an exemption being granted.

In respect of the above approval, Somerset Council Fostering Service will have regard to the space within a room and consider other factors (such as other household areas) when determining the approval numbers. Items such as space for a bed and wardrobe and play and study areas either within the bedroom or within the house are required as a minimum.

Sharing bedrooms:

Foster babies can sleep in a cot in a foster carer's bedroom. By the child's third birthday (latest), the child should no longer be sharing a bedroom with their foster carers and should have their own bedroom.

Foster children can only share a bedroom if they are siblings and are permitted to share a bedroom if the Fostering Service together with the child(ren)'s social worker deem it appropriate. In all cases, a Supervising Social Worker should complete a Safer Caring Family Agreement with foster carers and children (where appropriate) to assess risks that might be applicable when sharing, and to determine any actions that need to be taken or guidance that needs to be followed.

Somerset Council Fostering Service recognises that many children from sibling groups have previously shared a bedroom at their family home, or before coming into care; continuing to do so in a foster carers home can promote their sense of security. A child over the age of 10 years should not share a bedroom with a child of the opposite gender. In all circumstances where sharing of bedrooms is considered, a risk assessment should be completed by the supervising social worker in conjunction with the child(ren)'s social worker.

Somerset Council Fostering Service use a variation of approval categories; however, the main types of fostering are as follows:

- High Need (assessed and approved by external provider)
- Stepping Stones

- Short Stays & Occasional Care (defined under short-term up to 2 years)
- Link Carers
- Asylum Seeking Children
- Short Break Care
- Remand Fostering
- Emergency Care
- Kinship (terms of approval are limited to named children only)
- Parent & Child (defined as one or two parents and up to 2 children). Foster Carers wishing to provide parent and child arrangements will only be approved for this category.

Terms of Fostering:

- Short Term (up to 2 years)

This is caring for children and young people for up to 2 years. This includes short break care and all other types of short-term fostering.

- Long term. (2 years+)

This is caring for children and young people for the rest of their childhood. Permanent foster carers support children and young people and are an important part of their family as they mature into adulthood.

When recommending long-term approvals fostering Social Workers must:

- Include a comprehensive analysis about the foster carer's ability to provide long-term care now and in the future, identifying any support services that will be needed to achieve this. This information must be included either within the initial fostering assessment or annual review if returning to fostering panel to request a change of approval.
- In addition, a further assessment by the Supervising Social Worker and child's Social Worker must be completed for any specific children to assess the foster carer's suitability of providing them with long-term care, detailing how they will meet that child's individual needs and care plan, which will be subject to ratification at permanency panel.

Terminology used for approvals:

Format to be used on all documents and systems - Number of children, age range and term. Preferences. (Preferences do not need to be included and where possible should be kept to a minimum).

For example, 2 children, 0-18 years, Short-Term. (Name) has a preference for providing Short Break Care and Short Stays.

Or Parent and Child.

Parent and child foster carers for one or two parents and up to 2 children

3. Changes to approval which do not need to go back to Panel

Unless specifically prohibited by the original Panel approval process (or a first review) the following changes may be agreed, following consultation with the foster carer(s), by the Fostering Team Manager and Fostering Operations Manager through the review process without referral to Panel, to be considered by the non-panel ADM:

- Whether a foster carer is on the EDT list.
- Age range of carer's approval.
- Changes of approval which are considered a step-down and a less onerous task than that on the original approval e.g., short term approval for carers who are approved as long-term carers.
- Any change in number of children, e.g., from 1 child to 3 children.

More significant changes must be presented to panel e.g., '2 if siblings' to 2 unrelated children, or from 2 unrelated children to '3 if siblings'.

4. Placing a child outside of a foster carer's terms of approval.

Placing a child outside of a foster carer's approval should only be made for up to 6 working days. Any child's placement that is made in an emergency and is outside a foster carer's approval terms should therefore be moved before the 6th day has elapsed. An out of approval request should be sought and approved by the Fostering Operations Manager.

Although this means, for example, a short-term placement could be made using the emergency provision in the regulations, this was not the intended use of the regulation, which was designed to discourage placing children beyond a carer's terms of approval. Therefore, Somerset Council Fostering Service will endeavour to ensure that foster carer approval terms are sufficiently broad to take account of the greater flexibility that can be achieved for short term/overnight placements. In this way, foster carer approval terms will accurately reflect the anticipated use of all foster carers that are approved by the Fostering Service.

If the arrangement is likely to last longer than 6 working days a change to the carers terms of approval will be required.

In order to change a foster carer's approval, the requirement is to carry out a review of the foster carer's approval, and for the Decision Maker to issue a qualifying determination setting out the proposed change – with or without a recommendation from panel (it is good practice to seek a panel recommendation, but not a legal requirement unless this is the first annual review).

When considering a change to foster carers approval in this way, the fostering service must provide a report to the Agency Decision-Maker (ADM) by day 4 of the arrangement, detailing the following:

- The number, ages and circumstances of the children concerned.
- The arrangements proposed for the care and accommodation of the children concerned, including the sleeping arrangements.
- The period of time over which the placement is likely to last.
- The relationship between the foster carers and the children concerned.
- The likely effect on the children concerned and any other children living in the household.
- The views of the other children in the household.
- The foster carers' capacity to provide sufficient care for all the children in the placement and to safeguard and promote the welfare of the fostered children /

young people and any other children / young people who live in the foster home.

- The views of the social worker and IRO for all of the other children placed in the foster placement.
- The foster parent's agreement in writing to the proposed revision of terms.

The decision to change terms of approval would then be implemented at the end of 28 days from the date of the qualifying determination.

Further information can be found here: [The usual fostering limit, exemptions, and terms of approval of foster carers \(England\) | CoramBAAF](#)

5. Procedure for foster carers at fostering reviews, in connection with the above policy.

In respect of adhering to this policy, it is anticipated that all foster carer approvals will be discussed and explored through the fostering review mechanism, and the policy will be adhered to. (i.e.: the recording of fostering terms of approval and 'preferences'). However, where it is felt that there are exceptional circumstances where an approval should be narrower (e.g.: 0-5, instead of '0-18, with preferential age range of 0-5') a clear rationale will be recorded by the reviewing officer.

In order to change a foster carer's approval, the requirement is to carry out a review of the foster carer's approval, and for the Agency Decision Maker to issue a qualifying determination setting out the proposed change – with or without a recommendation from panel. Somerset Council Fostering Service will adhere to good practice wherever possible by seeking panel recommendation, however this is not a legal requirement unless this is the first annual review. The decision to change terms of approval would then be implemented at the end of 28 days from the date of the qualifying determination.

An annual review must take place no later than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider considers it necessary but must take place a

minimum of annually. As above, the first review must go back to the fostering panel. Annual reviews are carried out by an Independent Fostering Reviewing Officer in accordance with appropriate legislation, fostering regulations and guidance. The review will consider whether a foster carer's approval should continue and if there should be any changes to their terms of approval. Reviews are an opportunity to reflect over the previous year, consult others, acknowledge what has gone well, and consider any challenges as well as exploring the support needs of a foster carer. Reviews consider the views of the children living with the carers, the views of the carers and any professionals involved with the children in the household and anything else relevant to the foster carer and children in their care.

As detailed in The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (amended in 2013), in cases where the only change is to the terms of approval, as well as a determination notifying the foster carer of the proposed change, the Somerset Council Fostering Service will:

- (i) provide a statement setting out whether the fostering service considers that the foster carer or members of the foster carer's household (including any children placed there) may have additional support needs as a result of the proposed revision and, if so, how those needs will be met, and
- (ii) request the foster carers agreement in writing to the proposed revision of terms,

In all cases whether a review has been presented at the fostering panel or not, and if having considered the review report, the Agency Decision Maker feels it is appropriate to change the foster carer's terms of approval, a qualifying determination must always be issued. If the foster carer agrees to the change, it is then possible to 'waive' the 28 days' waiting period and implement the decision immediately, in which case the decision is not a qualifying determination.

The written agreement must be freely given by the foster carer. If the foster carer does not agree to the change to the terms of their approval, the decision cannot be implemented until 28 days from the date of the qualifying determination. The foster carer may make representations to Somerset Council Fostering Service or apply to the Secretary of State for a review of the qualifying determination (by applying to the Independent Review Mechanism) within the 28-day period.