

Investigating Standards of Care Policy and Procedures

Version number	Date updated	Updated by	Review date
Version number 1	August 2024	Kayte Luton Suzanne Sullivan	August 2025

Contents

1. Introduction and Purpose	2
2. Scope of Policy	2
3. Legal Context	2
4. Definition	2
5. Investigating Concerns for Standards of Care	3
6. Serious Causes for Concern – Safeguarding	4
7. Standards of Care Meeting	4
8. Process	5
9. Purpose of the Standards of Care meeting	5
10. Agenda for Standards of Care meeting	6
11. Foster Carer Review	6

1. Introduction and Purpose

Somerset Council is committed to providing the highest standards of care for Looked After Children. Children and young people have the right to feel safe, to be treated with respect, to be valued, and receive a quality of care consistent at least with the [National Minimum Standards \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk).

Ensuring the maintenance of good quality care is central to the Supervising Social Workers role in working to support the Foster Carer.

The relevant Practice Supervisor will maintain oversight of processes for ensuring a safe, quality environment and address minor issues through regular supervision of Supervising Social Workers.

2. Scope of Policy

This policy applies to all Somerset approved foster carers. The Standards of Care process will be followed where it has been identified by the relevant practice supervisor/fostering team manager, in consultation where appropriate with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), that there is a standard of care concern that requires further consideration/investigation.

3. Legal Context

In accordance with the following guidelines:

- [The Fostering Services \(England\) Regulations 2011 - Standard 12 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk) and
- [National Minimum Standard 22 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk)
- [Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership Procedures](#)

4. Definition

The Standards of Care procedure will be initiated when concern is raised by the relevant practice supervisor/fostering team manager that the care provided by the foster carer is deemed inadequate and/or unacceptable, and falls below the appropriate standards of practice, as set out in the [National Minimum Standards \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk), but does not constitute significant harm to the child/ren. Examples might include the standard of the foster care accommodation or quality of clothing provided for the child.

Where information is received that indicates safeguarding concerns for a Looked After Child or any other child within the fostering household, an [Allegations Reporting Form - Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership](#) (ARF), should be completed by

the Supervising Social Worker and sent to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for them to make an assessment of the safeguarding concerns, consult and provide advice to the fostering service.

5. Investigating Concerns for Standards of Care

A Standard of Care Concern may be identified by the Supervising Social Worker or other member of the Fostering Team, during the course of supervision and oversight of a fostering family. Alternatively, concerns regarding standards of care, complaints or safeguarding allegations regarding foster carers may come from outside of the Fostering service, for instance from another professional, the child/ren or member of the fostering family, school or health etc.

Any information received is considered by the Fostering Operations Manager, and where necessary the LADO (see above for ARF) and signposted accordingly, to be dealt with under the relevant process. They will be dealt with under one or more of the following ways:

- Standards of Care in relation to Approved Foster Carers;
- The [Complaints and Representations \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com)
- [The SSCP Complaints Process](#)
- [Somerset Fostering Allegations Policy and Procedure](#)

During consideration and further investigation of a concern under any one of the above processes, it may become apparent that the matter is more or less serious than first thought, and the process for investigation may change.

Complaints received from or about a young person's care will be recorded on the foster carer's LCS record, logged on iCase, and resolved using the complaints procedure and shared by the worker investigating the complaint, with the Practice Supervisor and Team Manager. This may include minor complaints that should be quickly and informally resolved.

If a Supervising Social Worker or the child/young person's Social Worker receives information from another party or identifies themselves a serious concern regarding a foster carer's performance in meeting standards of care, this should be recorded on a case note and sent to the Practice Supervisor and Team Manager within one working day.

The relevant Practice Supervisor/Team Manager will decide whether the concern should be investigated as a Standards of Care matter or as a safeguarding issue or complaint. They must ensure that the Serious Occurrence is recorded and logged as a manager's decisions and actions case note with details of the concern and rationale for decision making and outcome. Any subsequent discussion about the cause of

concern, should focus on standards/competences that are not being met to enable a measurable action plan that can be reviewed.

Where the relevant Practice Supervisor/ Team Manager confirms that the concern should be dealt with under the Standards of Care Procedure, the Supervising Social Worker must arrange to visit the foster carer within 5 working days of receiving the information to discuss the cause for concern.

In discussion with the Foster Carer the Supervising Social Worker will make the Foster Carer aware of the relevant National Minimum Standard 2011. The Supervising Social Worker will recommend how the issues will be addressed and propose timescales for completion of the action to bring standard of practice to the required level, in consultation with the foster carer.

The Supervising Social Worker will record the supervision visit and include in the record any actions and recommendations. This record will be signed by both parties.

The Supervising Social Worker will send a copy of the record of this visit to the Foster Carers within 5 working days.

If the Foster Carer does not agree to the proposed remedial action at the end of the meeting, or either party feels a further formal meeting is required, a Standards of Care meeting will be convened, and any previous records relevant to this matter will be considered.

If the proposed remedial plan is not completed within the timescales agreed or it becomes evident that that concerns remain about standards of care, then a Standards of Care Meeting can be convened, and as above any previous records relevant to this matter will be considered.

6. Serious Causes for Concern – Safeguarding

Where there are concerns that the standards of care may reach the threshold of 'significant harm' [Allegations Against Foster Carers Procedures](#) and [Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership Procedures](#) should be applied.

7. Standards of Care Meeting

These meetings are in place to ensure any serious and / or repeated concerns expressed by Looked After Children, Social Workers and others in relation to the care offered by Foster Carers are fully investigated, recorded and to enable actions and/ or support to be put in place to enable foster carers to provide the National Minimum Standards.

This meeting will be arranged where one of the following occurs:

- The Practice Supervisor/Team Manager decides that any one or more concern is of sufficient significance to warrant a meeting;
- Another Foster Carer uses the Fostering Service Whistleblowing Procedure and the Practice Supervisor/Team Manager decides a meeting with greater attendance is required to fully address the concerns raised;
- A Strategy Meeting has determined that the threshold of significant harm is not met, however concerns about the care offered or Foster Carers willingness to work with the Agency still remain.

Note: all issues regarding standards of care are currently addressed by the Fostering Service with the Foster Carer without delay.

8. Process

The Supervising Social Worker or where necessary the relevant Practice Supervisor/Team Manager will write to the Foster Carer to inform them of the concerns and invite them to a meeting.

The Supervising Social Worker will deliver the letter within 5 working days and will explain the content of the letter to the Foster Carer.

The invitation can include Foster Carer, Practice Supervisor/Team Manager, current Child's Social Worker(s) and Manager and if appropriate previous Social Worker, and their Manager. Other professionals including health, education and independent support, via FosterTalk for the foster carer, (where relevant and agreed by the Fostering Operations Manager) may be invited.

The Practice Supervisor/Team Manager will chair the meeting, and minutes will be taken by a member of the Fostering Service. The minutes will be shared with all attendees of the meeting.

9. Purpose of the Standards of Care meeting

To enable a full and open discussion on the identified concerns and identify a way forward. Some potential outcomes to consider may be:

- additional training and/or closer supervision of the Foster Carers practice to support development.
- The Foster Care Review could be brought forward. The Fostering Review Officer will have access to the minutes of the Standards of Care Meeting.
- The Fostering Reviewing Officer could give a recommendation on changing the foster carer's terms of approval and request a return to fostering panel for a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

- Further Investigation
- And/or learning for the Local Authority.

The Supervising Social Worker will ensure the detail of the recorded cause for concern/s within the Standard of Care meeting are detailed within their report (Family Placement Worker Report) for the next Foster Care Review.

10. Agenda for Standards of Care meeting

- Reason for Meeting;
- Any previous concerns in relation to the Foster Carer;
- Sharing Information;
- Work already undertaken to resolve the issue;
- Agreed actions, date and by whom;
- Decision about whether the Foster Care Review to be brought forward and the Agency's recommendation as to the Foster Carers continued approval.

A copy of the minutes will be kept in the Carers Record.

11. Foster Carer Review

Where it is decided a Foster Care Review is required, the review must consider if the carers approval remains suitable to foster or whether their terms of approval should be changed. A recommendation will be given to fostering panel and foster carers will have access to independent support via FosterTalk, where it is considered necessary and agreed by the Fostering Operations Manager.

If a decision to de-register is made by the Agency Decision Maker, the foster carers may make representations within 28 days to the Agency Decision Maker.

Any decision affecting the approval details of the foster carer/s is communicated both verbally and in writing as soon as possible. Notice of termination of approval or alterations to approval is given to carers in writing from the Agency Decision Maker for Fostering Panel. At this point, carers will be informed of the complaints procedure and appeal process ([IRM - Apply for a review panel - adopters and foster carers May 2022.pdf \(sharepoint.com\) \(www.gov.uk\)](#)). The Fostering Service Operations Manager is responsible for notifying the LADO of the outcome of a review.

Any representations to appeal, received from the Foster Carer will be recorded on the Foster Carers LCS file and the Chronology, with an outcome clearly stated.