



**NORTH SOMERSET  
COUNCIL  
FAMILY LINK  
SHORT BREAK SCHEME  
FOR DISABLED CHILDREN**

**STATEMENT OF  
PURPOSE**

**Reviewed June 2011**

## **1. Aim**

The Family Link Scheme aims to support parents and families in caring for their disabled child and improving their overall quality of life by providing a series of planned short breaks which support the children using the scheme to achieve the five Every Child Matters Outcomes.

Be Healthy  
Be Safe  
Enjoy and Achieve  
Make a positive Contribution  
Achieve economic well being

## **2. Objectives**

- To ensure that parents are the main carers for the child or young person and remain central to the promotion of their health and educational needs.
- To provide the opportunity for all children and young people using the family link scheme to experience inclusive social opportunities within a safe and caring family environment.
- To safeguard and protect the well being of children and young people placed with North Somerset family link carers.
- To recruit, assess and train a range of family link carers with the appropriate skills to meet the individual needs of children requiring placement, through comprehensive policies on recruitment, training, assessment and review of family link carers.
- To match children and young people referred to the team for placement with carers able to meet their individual needs as identified in their care plans.
- To provide high quality support and supervision of family link carers and their families to enable them to fulfil their tasks.
- To monitor and maintain standards of care through regular contact and supervisory visits to family link carers in consultation with children using the scheme, their parents/carers social workers, and other agencies.

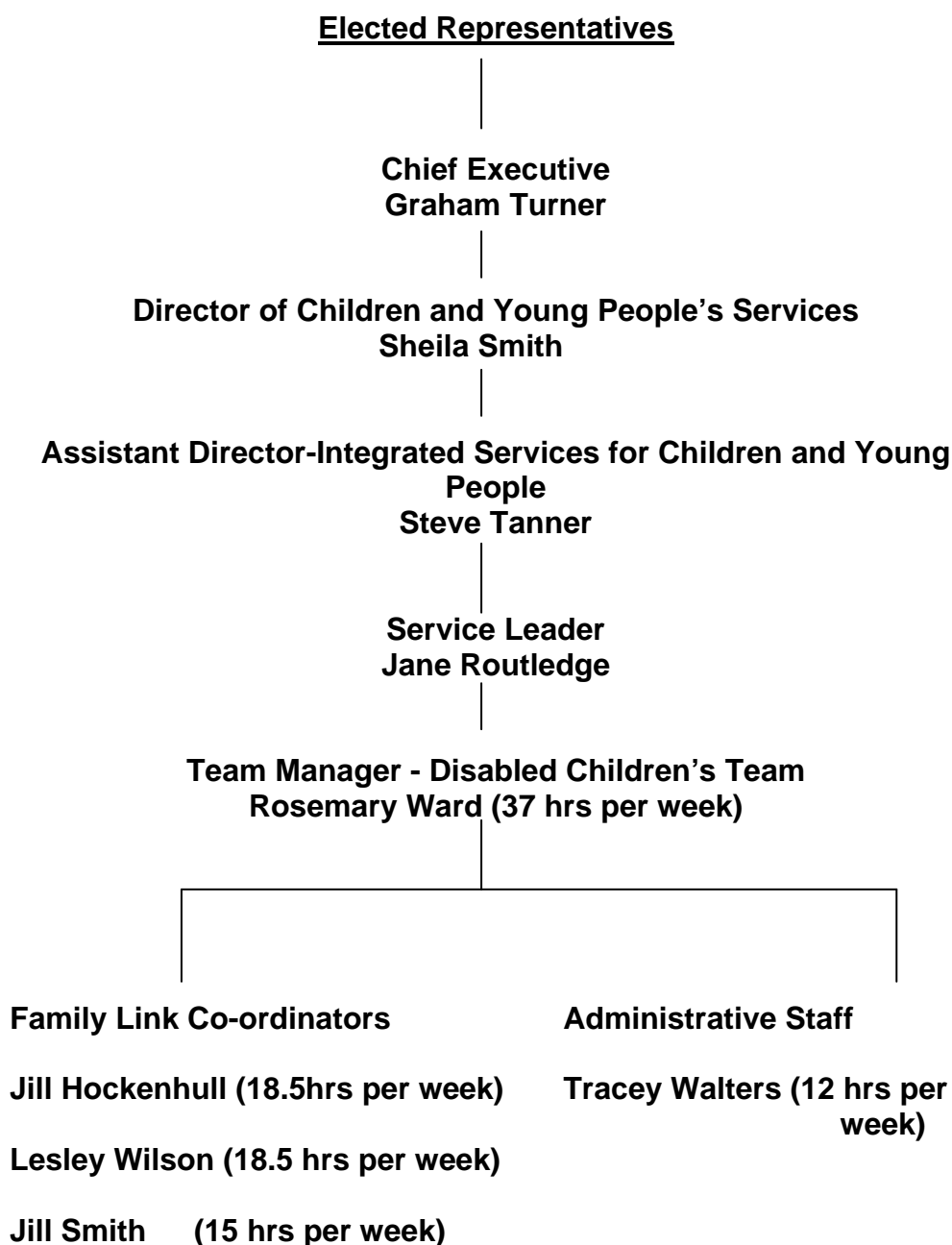
- To work together with all children's services and the resource panel in North Somerset and partner agencies involved with disabled children and young people by providing a consultation and support service to optimise the use of the family link scheme.
- To work within the overall policies and procedures of North Somerset Council and contribute to the development of those policies and procedures where appropriate.

### **3. Principles & Standards of Care**

- Under the regulatory framework of the Care Standards Act 2000 (CSA) The family link scheme aims to comply with the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering and the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England ) regulations 2010 and Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4 :Fostering Services.
- The Family Link Scheme aims to pursue best practice at all times taking into consideration up to date research and best practice guidance from a variety of resources.
- The welfare, safety and needs of the child will be the paramount consideration in their care, decision- making, planning and day-to-day work. Their views will be sought using appropriate communication methods to ensure they are able to fully participate at all stages of the process.
- Practice in relation to the recruitment, training, assessment, supervision, support and review of family link carers will underpin the maintenance of the Every Child Matters Outcomes
- The Family Link Scheme will work closely with partner agencies including health and education to ensure consistency in approach to managing and responding to the child's individual needs.
- The views of family link carers and families, parents, children, children's teams and partner agencies will be sought and taken into account in monitoring, reviewing and developing the service.
- The family link scheme works within the Council's equal opportunities policy in relation to staff, carers and service users.

- Family Link Carers and prospective family link carers will be treated with respect and consideration and staff will work in partnership with them in the provision of care.

## North Somerset Council Management and Staffing Structure



Steve Tanner –Assistant Director-Integrated Services for Children and Young People is manager with overall responsibility for the Family Link Scheme fostering service and is the Agency Decision Maker.

Rosemary Ward - Disabled Children Team Manager is registered with the General Social Care Council and is a qualified social worker with extensive experience in childcare social work and management.

Rosemary Ward holds a Certificate in managing care from the Open University completed in September 2006.

The Family Link Co-ordinators are all professionally qualified social workers, registered with the General Social Care Council. They all have substantial experience in childcare social work and have many years experience in running North Somerset Council's family link scheme.

Tracey Walters Administrative Assistant holds a BTEC National Business and is a qualified AAT Accounting Technician. Tracey has supported both the adoption and fostering service for 5 years.

All social workers and Administrative Assistant receive supervision bi monthly from the Team Manager. There is an annual appraisal system in operation for all staff.

The Team Manager receives monthly supervision from her line manager Jane Routledge.

Family Link Team Meetings are held monthly to discuss recruitment and retention, children and young people on the waiting list and matching considerations and issues and developments relating to the scheme.

Administrative staff supports the team with typing, record keeping, preparing panel papers etc.

The team is responsible for:

- the recruitment, assessment and preparation training of prospective Family Link Carers.
- The supervision, support and ongoing training of established Family Link Carers.
- Liaising with parents, Children's services and partner agencies in respect of matters relating to the running of the scheme or the children using the scheme.

#### **4. Family Link Carers**

Family link carers provide a series of planned short breaks for disabled children. The children live at home with their parents and carers and can receive overnight respite care or day care leading to overnight stays with the family link carer.

The number of family link carers currently approved by North Somerset is 19 and there are currently 24 children and young people placed with them.

A payment for skills scheme was introduced in 2006 which recognises the skills and experience of carers.

The three levels of the 'Payment for skills' scheme reflect the considerable skills that carers develop. It also creates a career structure that allows carers to progress, receiving a higher rate of payment upon achieving each level.

Most newly approved carers will start at level one. Once a carer gains more evidence-based experience, knowledge, skills and completes the mandatory training, they can then be assessed to progress to a higher skill level. This is achieved by completing the core value competencies and receiving a recommendation from their family link co-ordinator, which is then reviewed at foster panel. If the panel approves the recommendation it is then ratified by the Assistant Director of Integrated Services for Children and Young People.

Level two carers will have undertaken at least one year of fostering. The fostering panel will have deemed that suitable skills have been demonstrated and specific, additional training has been undertaken to ensure they can manage more challenging placements.

Level three carers would be able to demonstrate the skills and ability to meet the most complex needs children. They would also be expected to have achieved an equivalent qualification (formerly Childcare NVQ level three). Level three carers are also expected to contribute to the recruitment of prospective carers and the development of the service. They are also expected to mentor other carers on a needs-led basis.

## **5. Procedures for Recruiting, Training, Supporting & Reviewing Carers**

### **Recruitment**

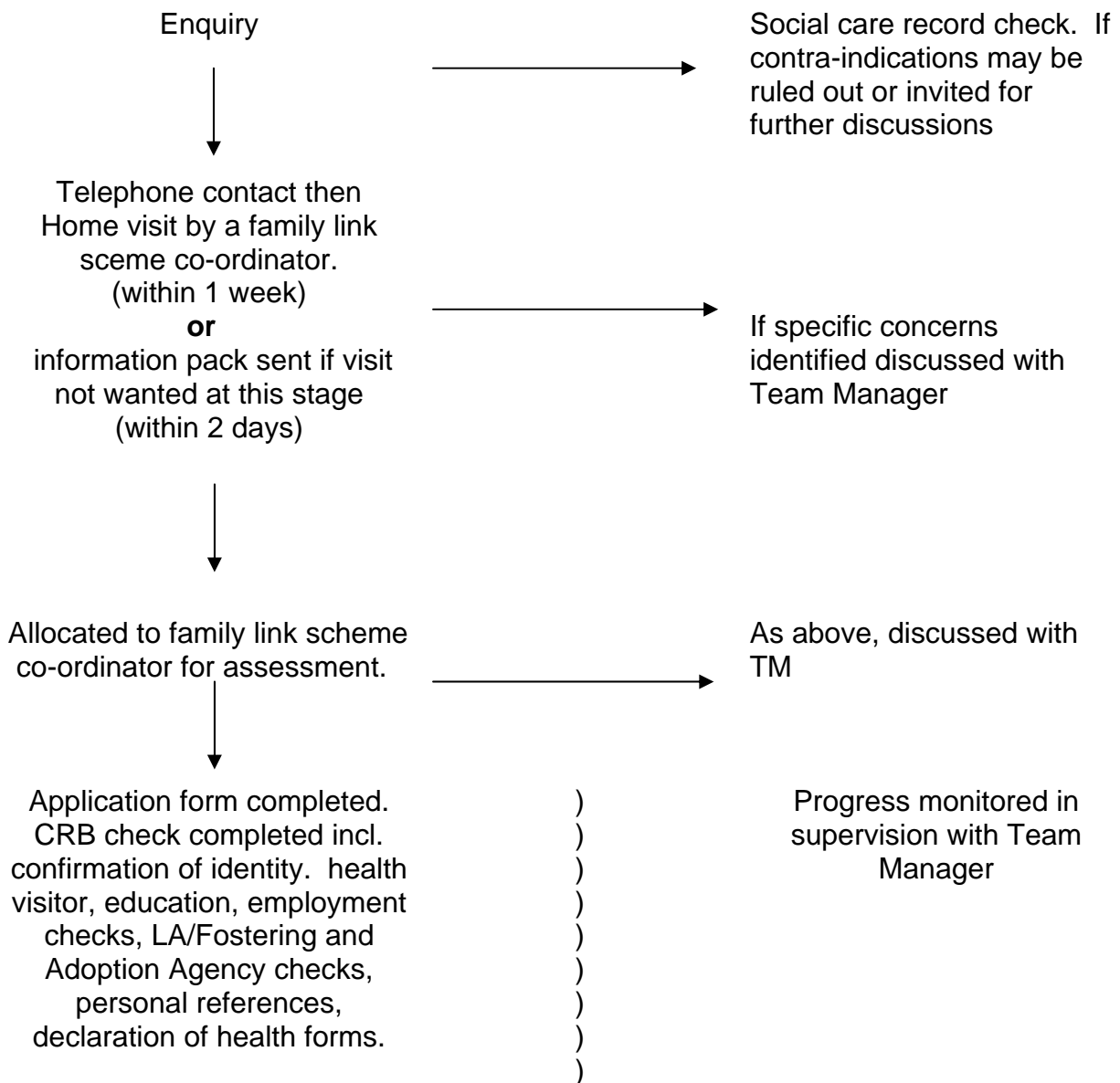
Enquiries about becoming family link carers are generated in a number of ways:

- General publicity and advertising throughout the year as part of a strategy aimed at raising the profile of the family link scheme in the local community (newspaper articles, local radio, television, posters, bookmarks, leaflet drops, internet).
- Via North Somerset Council's web site

- Via North Somerset's Adoption and Fostering Team
- Specific campaigns linked to Share the Care week via Short Breaks Network.
- Word of mouth – staff and existing family carers including regular advertising through the council's vacancy bulletin and salary slips.

### Approval Process

Enquiry to Approval  
(timescale within 8 months)





Home visits using Shared Care assessment form and framework. Visits to referees. Visits to extended family where applicable. Completion of home study assessment with applicants )  
)  
)



6 week preparation course run by family link co-ordinators

Short Breaks Home Study Report seen and signed by applicants and TM



Application considered by Fostering Panel. Applicants invited to attend.



Recommendation to Assistant Director – decision to approve or refuse

### **Foster Panel**

Family Link carers are reviewed annually by the fostering practice leader and are reviewed at Foster Panel every three years. Newly approved foster carers will be fully reviewed at Panel on the completion of their first full year.

Family Link Carers will be reviewed at foster panel more frequently if, for example, there is a major change in their circumstances, they are subject to a complaint or allegation, or if a request for a change of approval is made.

The annual review is completed by the family link co-ordinator following discussion with all members of the carers family and is informed by reports from all placing social workers. Child care social workers are expected to contribute to the carer's annual review by completing a feedback form. Carers also contribute to their reviews via a feedback form and attendance at the Panel.

Other professionals involved in the child's care plan such as; reviewing officer, Consult or health professional are also encouraged to provide feedback for the fostering review.

This report is presented to the fostering panel for recommendations regarding approval, termination of approval or change of registration. For example, the Panel monitors the achievement of each carer's training and is responsible for deciding when carers are ready to progress to higher skill levels.

The Assistant Director of Integrated Services for Children and Young People makes the final decision based on the Foster Panel's recommendation.

### **Independent Review Mechanism**

All potential and current carers are given the option of an independent review of the fostering services intention not to approve them as carers or to change the terms of their approval.

### **Members of the foster panel**

Chair (Independent member)	Rita Roblin
Vice chair (independent member)	Robert Summers
Panel adviser	Michelle Oliver
Medical adviser and Looked-after children's nurse	Sheila Harding
Service leader – Resource service	Kirsty Howie
Practice leader – Recruitment team	Rosa Baiges
Social worker – Community childcare team	Cathy Mathieson
Councillor	Reyna Knight
Independent member	Sarah Stacey
Independent member	Margaret Morgan
Panel administrator	Denise Harris

## **Training**

During the assessment process, applicants attend 'When am I coming to stay' based on the National Extension College preparation course. If there are not enough applicants to run a course the training is completed on an individual basis. This is 6 weekly sessions of 2 hours, based on the following topics that include the six CWDC short break standards;

- Disability Awareness
- Working with the family of a child with a disability.
- Like any other child
- Skills and responsibilities of caring
- Child Protection
- Safe caring
- A positive partnership

Where a couple are applying, both are expected to attend. Missed sessions will be covered by the assessing social worker.

Post approval training is organised mainly by the family link co-ordinators and a programme of mainstream foster carer training is circulated to all family link carers. This is being updated to cover areas of training required for National Minimum Standards, and is linked to NVQ competencies. Each carer's training needs are covered as part of the annual review and individual records maintained of training completed.

Family link carers are encouraged to undertake NVQ Level 3.

## **Supervision and Support**

All family link carers have an allocated co-ordinator from the family link scheme team. The co-ordinator is responsible for the carers supervision and support, including the needs of the carer's own children. A support and supervision agreement is completed with each carer which details expectations on both sides. Levels of contact are agreed in individual cases and there will as a minimum be monthly telephone contact and a visit within 3 months.

An unannounced visit is made at least annually.

Records are kept of all visits and carers are encouraged to access their files. Family link carers are provided with diaries and are requested to maintain written recordings on children placed. These are discussed at regular intervals in supervisory visits.

Family link co-ordinators attend planning meetings and reviews wherever possible and appropriate for the child.

Family link carers can contact their link co-ordinator for advice information and support whenever necessary. If the co-ordinator is unavailable another co-ordinator or the team manager will respond to urgent requests.

Out of office hours family link carers should in the first instance contact the child's parent/carer, if they are not available they should contact the Resources Team or the Emergency Duty Team.

Family link carers are provided with necessary furniture and equipment (on loan) to meet the needs of the child and meet safety standards.

A confidential counselling service is provided for family link carers, to which they have direct and free access on any matter.

Family link allowances are paid fortnightly in accordance with a published schedule, and written guidance is provided on what is covered, and what exceptional expenses may be claimed.

A family link carer's insurance policy is maintained by North Somerset Council which covers personal liability, legal expenses in the event of court action against the carer, and damage and loss caused by the child on placement. Family Link Carers make an initial claim against their own insurance.

### **Review**

Family link carers are reviewed annually or more frequently in the case of a major change of circumstances, following an allegation or serious complaint, or if a request for a change of approval is made.

The annual review is completed by the family link co-ordinator following discussion with all members of the carer's family and reports from all placing social workers and Independent reviewing Officers from the Quality Assurance. Disabled children and their parents/ carers are invited to contribute to the review process where this is appropriate to do so.

Prior to their review the Team Manager seeks the view of the Family Link Carer on the scheme and the support they have received during the year. Their responses are incorporated into the annual review.

The review report is presented to the fostering panel, which makes recommendations regarding continuation, revision or

termination of approval. The final decision to approve is made by the Assistant Director Children and Young People's Services.

## **6. Complaints and Allegations**

### **Complaints**

The North Somerset complaints procedure is sent to all family link carers, and parents and where appropriate to children and young people. Family link carers may complain on behalf of a child as well as on their own account.

Complaints may be made either to the Team Manager or to the Complaints Officer, but in either case the complaint will be initially investigated and responded to by the Team Manager.

If the complainant is not satisfied then the second stage procedure is implemented by the Complaints Officer.

A complainant may receive assistance on request from an independent supporter. In the case of a child or young person making a complaint they will be offered an independent advocate.

There have been no complaints received during 2011.

#### Contact details for Complaints

Rosemary Ward, Team Manager, Disabled Children's Team.  
Children & Young People's Services, Weston Court,  
Oldmixon Crescent, Weston super-Mare. BS24 9AU  
Tel: 10934 427669  
E mail [rosemary.ward@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:rosemary.ward@n-somerset.gov.uk)

Christopher Orlik, Complaints Manager,  
14, Fenswood Rd, Long Ashton. BS41 9BS  
Tel: 01275 882 171  
E mail [Christopher.orlik@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:Christopher.orlik@n-somerset.gov.uk)

Complainants may also contact Ofsted (see below)

### **Allegations against family link carers**

Allegations about the standard of care provided by family link carers, of abuse or neglect of a child by foster carers are investigated according to the North Somerset Safeguarding Children Board, Managing Abuse Allegations against Foster Carers procedure.

There has been 1 allegation made against a Family Link Carer during 2011 this was investigated and was unfounded.

Any family link carer who has been the subject of a serious complaint or allegation will be reviewed and presented to panel

### **The Registration Authority**

The family link scheme is regulated and inspected by Ofsted. Ofsted is an independent, non governmental public body responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting fostering services under the regulatory framework of the Care Standards Act 2000

#### **Ofsted aims to**

- promote service improvement
- ensure services focus on the interests of their users
- ensure that services are efficient, effective and promote value for money.

The Family Link Scheme is inspected every 3 years by Ofsted, who may be contacted at:

The Inspection Support Team  
South Regional Centre  
Fresh Ford House  
Redcliffe Way  
Bristol  
BS1 6NL.  
Tel: 0300 1231231

The statement of purpose is reviewed annually. It is distributed to Ofsted and is available to parents, family link carers and where appropriate children and young people. It is available on North Somerset Council's website.