

Wiltshire Council

# Foster Carers' Charter

May 2012



## Introduction

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Wiltshire Council recognises the excellent care, support and commitment shown by foster carers and the invaluable role they play in the lives of Wiltshire's looked after children and young people. This charter aims to re-enforce that recognition, demonstrate the joint responsibilities to the children and young people in our care and build on the success and achievements of fostering in Wiltshire.

'A good quality foster placement helps achieve stability for the child, satisfaction for the carer and, most important of all, is a vital element in helping children and young people to have a decent second chance at a safe and fulfilling childhood' Tim Loughton MP Children's Minister, The Foster Carers' Charter, Ministerial Forward.

The Government launched the Foster Carers' Charter in March 2011. It was jointly produced with fostering organisations, charities and children and young people. Recognising the invaluable work of foster carers, it sets out clear principles, based on the core belief that children come first, on how foster carers should be treated, the roles of carers and the pivotal role played by carers in helping children achieve to their full potential.

Wiltshire Council has embraced the principles of the charter and through the consultation and involvement of children, young people, foster carers and various partners we have developed our own Wiltshire Foster Carers' Charter.

This charter builds on existing solid foundations and includes the ongoing commitment by Wiltshire Council to carers through day-to-day support, events and activities for foster families, to listen to carers, children and young people, to value highly the contribution of carers in all areas, to have high aspirations for the children and young people in our care and to further develop and expand foster care in Wiltshire. We believe this should be a 'living' document and should adapt to and reflect best practice.

## Mission statement

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### **Children and Young People come first.**

Children and young people in foster care deserve to experience as full a family life as possible as part of a loving family with carers who can make everyday decisions as they would their own child and without the child or young person feeling that they 'stand out' as a looked after child.

It is important that foster carers understand and empathise with the specific issues that looked after children and young people face without making them feel that they 'stand out'.

Children and young people must be given every support to develop their own identities and aspirations, fulfil their potential, and take advantage of all opportunities to promote their talent and skills. Above all, they should be listened to.

## Signatures

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**Signed by:**

 Jane Scott OBE  
Leader of the Council

  
**Carolyn Godfrey**

Director of Children Services

  
**Vicki Taberner-Hall**

Chair of Wiltshire Fostering Association

## Roles and commitment

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Wiltshire Council aims to provide and maintain stable and first rate foster care for children and young people who are valued, supported and encouraged to grow and develop as individuals. To achieve this aim, we recruit, train and approve foster carers and deliver ongoing support to them.

## The foster carer's role

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Foster carers are at the heart of the fostering service. We are assessed, trained and supported to look after children and young people in a family environment, providing them with stability, care and an opportunity to grow and develop and to reach their potential.

Our working relationships are based on mutual trust and respect. This charter explains what we expect from each other in order to provide first rate foster care for all children and young people placed in our care.

### **Fostering service commitment**

You can expect from us:

1. Working in partnership
2. Information
3. Clarity about decisions
4. Support
5. Learning and development
6. Fair treatment
7. Communication and consultation

### **Foster carer's commitment**

You can expect from us:

1. Working in partnership
2. Information
3. Respect for the child
4. Support for the child
5. Learning and development
6. Communication and consultation

# What foster carers can expect from the fostering service and its partners

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## 1. Working in partnership

We recognise that foster carers have skills and expertise and make a unique and significant difference to the everyday lives of looked after children and young people which can endure into adulthood.

We as Wiltshire Council with the support of our partners will:

- Recognise and value your skills and expertise equally to those of other professionals
- Treat you without discrimination and respect you as a colleague
- Recognise that you are the people who live with children and young people every day and therefore have a unique relationship with, and knowledge and understanding of, the child or young person placed with you
- Recognise the importance of the child's/young person's relationship with you and the members of your household
- When making a foster placement ensure the wishes and feelings of the child or young person are listened to and taken into account
- Include you in all meetings that affect you and the children/young people you care for on a day to day basis through consultation or attendance
- Ensure that Wiltshire Council Fostering Service meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance
- Respect you and your family's confidentiality
- Meet or consult with you regularly to share information and seek your views
- Ensure transparency between all involved in the team around the child/young person

## 2. Information

We know that information is vital in order for foster carers to provide care that meets the child's/young person's needs.

We as Wiltshire Council with the support of our partners will:

- Make sure you have all the information you need in order to care safely for the child/young person and keep yourself and members of your foster family safe
- Provide this information in writing prior to placement unless where they are emergency placements and it is not feasible to do so, when we will provide this information within five working days
- Make sure foster children/young people have information about their foster carer, the foster home and members of the fostering household before placement, including during emergency placements
- Ensure that there is a Placement Plan drawn up in discussion with you, the child's parents where possible, and the foster child/young person and agreed with you

- Ensure that you are included, consulted with and updated following events in the child's/young person's life including appointments, contact and meetings
- Provide you with written information on all financial matters including tax, allowances, and additional entitlements which are updated as required
- Provide you with full details of all relevant policies and procedures which are updated as required
- Make sure you receive regular updates on events and issues relevant to the fostering service including Wiltshire's foster carers' newsletter – Fostering News

### **3. Clarity about decisions**

We recognise that in order for children and young people to live a full family life foster carers must be able to make decisions regarding the children they foster.

We as Wiltshire Council with the support of our partners will:

- Ensure that wherever possible you are able to make everyday decisions that mean that your fostered child/young person is not treated differently to their peers and can feel part of your family
- Ensure that you and your foster child/young person have a clear agreement, included in the Placement Plan, on the decisions that you can make for each child/young person in your care
- Provide clarity to you and your foster child/young person about any decisions you cannot make at the outset so that everyone understands who is responsible for what
- Ensure foster children and young people understand who can make what decisions and the reason for this

### **4. Support**

We recognise that fostering is a challenging task and carers can feel isolated, and appropriate and timely support makes all the difference to the fostering family and to the child or young person in your care.

We as Wiltshire Council with the support of our partners will:

- Provide and ensure you have access to the identified support that you need
- Regularly review your support needs and respond positively, and in a planned way, to requests for additional support
- Provide you with regular and timely supervision and support in line with foster carers supervision policy
- Listen to your concerns and take action when needed
- Give you open and honest feedback in all our dealing with you and provide opportunities for you to do the same
- Provide you with out of hours support and access to 24 hour support from appropriately qualified workers
- Pay you allowances, expenses and fees in a timely manner

- Pay allowances that reflect the Fostering Network's recommended rates
- Provide clarity regarding payments to foster carers for young people who stay with their foster carer after they leave care
- Have an open and transparent fee scheme open to all foster carers
- Provide you with membership of the Fostering Network and Wiltshire Fostering Association
- Ensure that there are local support groups recognised by the Fostering Service where you and your family can find support and share experiences with other fostering families

## **5. Learning and development**

We believe that foster carers should be enabled to access learning and development opportunities throughout their fostering career. This will ensure that carers have the skills and knowledge they need to develop their practice so they can help transform the lives of the children and young people they care for.

We as Wiltshire Council with the support of our partners will:

- Provide you with the support you need to achieve the CWDC Training, Support and Development Standards
- Make sure you have a Personal Professional Development Plan outlining your training and development needs which is regularly reviewed
- Provide you and your family with appropriate, relevant and progressive training by trainers who understand the fostering task
- Provide you with training as and when you need it to promote understanding of relevant issues such as mental health; behaviour management; attachment and loss etc
- Provide training in a variety of formats and at times and venues to meet your needs with the support you need to access
- Ensure you have access to Wiltshire Pathways
- Provide you with other developmental opportunities which make the best use of your skills and experience, such as mentoring or providing training or support

## **6. Fair treatment**

We will ensure that you and the children/young people in your care are listened to, treated fairly and with respect no matter what the circumstances.

We as Wiltshire Council with the support of our partners will:

- Consult with you via Wiltshire Fostering Association before changing terms and conditions
- Ensure openness in all our discussions and communications with you
- Provide you with information on Wiltshire Council's framework for dealing with allegations and adhere to this framework

- Ensure that you are treated with respect, kept informed and provided with independent support should you be subject to an allegation
- Ensure that you know the arrangements for the payment of fees and allowances in the event that you are not able to foster while the subject of an allegation

## **7. Communication and consultation**

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship.

We as Wiltshire Council with the support of our partners will:

- Facilitate regular communication between you and foster children/young people with senior officers of Wiltshire Council Children's Services and Elected Members and the Children in Care Council where appropriate
- Ensure that we consult with you in a meaningful way on matters that affect you and give you timely feedback from consultations
- Ensure the Wiltshire Fostering Association is able to communicate regularly with the Fostering Service and staff members of the Association on behalf of carers



# What the fostering service and its partners can expect from foster carers

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## 1. Working in partnership

We will deliver a high standard of care and conduct ourselves in a professional manner.

We as Wiltshire Council Foster Carers will:

- Include foster children and young people as part of our family by including them in our daily routines and activities
- Provide a safe, warm and caring home
- Respect confidentiality
- Meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance and follow departmental policies and procedures
- Use our knowledge, expertise and skills to the best of our ability
- Attend meetings, and provide information for meetings, about the children and young people we care for
- Work with the team around the child/young person for example work with education and health colleagues
- Show a willingness to work with birth parents, wider family and people significant in a child's/young person's life

## 2. Respect for the child

Every child/young person should be respected as an individual and be supported in meeting their needs and achieving their aspirations and potential in line with the 5 Every Child Matters priority outcomes.

We as Wiltshire Council Foster Carers will:

- Provide for the child/young person a loving, caring, safe, supportive and secure family environment
- Listen to and respect the views of children/young people in our care
- Commit to understanding the child/young person in our care and the issues in their lives and how this affects their actions and behaviours
- Respect and promote children's and young people's identity and religious, linguistic and cultural heritage
- Empower and allow children and young people to make decisions regarding their own lives, as appropriate to their age and understanding
- Advocate for children and young people in our care when necessary

### **3. Support for the child**

As Wiltshire foster carers we must have high expectations for the children and young people in our care, high ambitions for them and provide the support to achieve their aspirations.

We as Wiltshire Council Foster Carers will:

- Support the child/young person to achieve and maintain good health
- Support the child/young person to do well at school
- Support the child/young person in their aspirations
- Encourage and enable children and young people to form positive relationships with their peers
- Show the child/young person we have high expectations and believe they can succeed
- Support children and young people as they grow to gain life experiences and become independent by passing on our own life skills i.e. communication, decision making, cooking, money management etc
- Provide support and advice to, and advocate for, the children and young people in our care

### **4. Information**

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship.

We as Wiltshire Council Foster Carers will:

- Provide information about our family, hobbies, interests and home life for children and young people who may come to live with us
- We will spend time to get to know children and young people placed in our care and not judge children/young people on the information given to us
- Inform the Fostering Service about changes in our household
- Inform the Fostering Service about any difficulties that arise for us
- Inform the Fostering Service/child's social worker/emergency duty team immediately about any serious issues and incidents that happen to, or affect any child or young person in our care
- Keep and share records in line with Wiltshire Fostering Service recording policy

## **5. Learning and development**

We must be enabled to access learning and development opportunities throughout our fostering career. This will ensure that we have the skills and knowledge we need, and allow us to develop our practice in order that we can help transform the lives of the children and young people we foster.

We as Wiltshire Council Foster Carers will:

- Complete the CWDC Training, Support and Development Standards within the required timescales
- Be prepared to develop our skills throughout our fostering career and use these skills in caring for children and young people to make a positive impact thus enabling the child/young person to reach their potential
- Regularly attend core and further relevant training
- Attend and contribute to support groups and events
- Be open to using support when offered to help make placements work well

## **6. Communication and consultation**

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship.

We as Wiltshire Council Foster Carers will:

- Consult and communicate with the foster children/young people in our care when making decisions in line with delegated authority
- Take an active role in local consultations and discussions in order to inform the development of the service
- Meet with elected members, senior managers and other professionals during consultation and support events
- Encourage our own, and foster children and young people, to attend local consultation groups such as the Children in Care Council and the Sons and Daughters Group