

Wiltshire Council Fostering Service

Statement of Purpose

November 2016



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1. Introduction

This Statement of Purpose is a requirement of the National Minimum Fostering Standards and the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 and National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering. This statement is written to inform people about our service, what it does and how it works.

The Wiltshire Fostering Service Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually. The Statement of Purpose has been endorsed by the Children Services Senior Management Team.

Copies of the Statement of Purpose will be available to those working in the Fostering Service, childcare team managers and social workers. A copy will also be given to the Wiltshire Fostering Association and to all foster carers in Wiltshire. It will also be available on the Council website.

2. Statement of Intent

Children and young people come first.

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

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

Wiltshire's Fostering Service is committed to providing high quality care to looked after children and young people in order to maximise their life chances and ensure that they have the opportunity to develop and achieve in all aspects of their lives.

3. Principles of the service

All foster carers in Wiltshire are expected to provide a high standard of care to the child or young person in placement. The care they receive should meet their holistic needs, including their cultural, physical, emotional, health, social, educational and developmental needs.

The principles which underpin this work are:

- Children and young people come first; their needs will be at the centre of all the work of the fostering service.

- Children and young people will be fully involved in all aspects of their care and will be treated with respect.
- Formal decisions regarding individual children and young people in foster care should be taken in full consultation with them, their parents and their foster carers. The views of other significant adults will also be taken into account.
- Children and young people's safety and welfare are paramount and the experience of being looked after should not disadvantage any child or young person.
- Staff and foster carers should ensure that every child or young person has the opportunity to reach their full potential.
- Achieving permanence for a child will be the main consideration in working with children in need and their families and in working with any child who becomes looked after by Wiltshire Council.
- Children and young people who cannot live with their own birth families have a right to a choice of suitable foster placement which provides stability and promotes and safeguards their welfare.
- Foster carers have a unique contribution to make to a child or young person's growth and development and they will be respected by all professionals involved with the child or young person.
- Foster placements should provide a high standard of physical and emotional care and a safe and secure environment in which children are protected from abuse and harm.
- The Fostering Service is committed to valuing diversity and promoting equality. Services will be provided which meet individual needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality.
- The Fostering Service recognises the importance of birth families and continuity of relationships so that children and young people can maintain and develop their identity and their physical and mental wellbeing is promoted.
- Foster placements will be provided locally in order to maintain family, school and community ties, wherever possible.
- Whenever possible, foster placements will be provided locally in order to maintain family, school and community ties.
- The Fostering Service will actively promote and support appropriate family contact.
- The Fostering Service will ensure that a child or young person's educational, health, emotional and social needs are properly met in order to promote their health and personal development and optimise opportunity and potential.
- Appropriate preparation and support will be offered to young people leaving care to ensure that they are able to make a successful transition to independence which recognises that all young people continue to need support into adulthood.
- Positive outcomes for children and young people are best achieved when

families, children and young people, foster carers and involved professionals work together in partnership to ensure that the child or young person's interests remain at the heart of the services provided. Partnership work will be actively promoted in order to maximise the life chances of young people in care.

- Foster carers, children and young people and their parents should be able to challenge decisions and plans made by the fostering service and be aware of the formal procedures by which they can exercise their right of challenge.
- The Fostering Service will provide good quality and consistency in the provision of supervision, support and information to foster carers to enable them to meet the individual needs of the child or young person and to develop their skills as carers on a continuing basis.

4. Aims and objectives of the service

The Fostering Service aims to provide high quality care for children and young people in a family setting that reflects their individual needs and cultural values by:

- Undertaking a rigorous assessment of all carers based on their competencies, skills and ability to meet the needs of looked after children; regardless of the carer's race, gender, class, age, marital status, sexual orientation or disability.
- Recruitment, assessing and training of prospective foster carers to develop a diverse range of carers who can provide safe and secure care to children with wide ranging needs.
- Aiming to continue to increase the number of local foster placements to improve placement choice which reflects the views and wishes of the children and parents.
- Providing a fostering service that reflects the cultural, racial, and religious identities of children and young people from a diverse range of groups.
- Organising targeted and general recruitment campaigns to attract prospective foster carers to the service and raise awareness of the needs of children and young people looked after by Wiltshire.
- Delivering preparation training groups for prospective foster carers in order to prepare them for the role of fostering and raise awareness of the needs of children and young people looked after by Wiltshire Council.
- Providing foster carers with the supervision, support, training and written guidance they need to develop their skills and provide a high quality care to Wiltshire's looked after children and young people.
- Ensuring the placement of children and young people with families who have been assessed and approved to provide secure, warm, safe and supportive homes in which they can positively develop all aspects of their lives.
- Providing a foster placement that is assessed as being in the child or young person's best interest by carefully matching with a carer capable of meeting their assessed individual needs and where the care given is most likely to promote and safeguard their welfare.

- Ensuring that a child's religious, cultural and linguistic needs are properly understood and met in their foster placement.
- Ensuring that placements promote stability and positive outcomes for children and young people by working in partnership with children, young people, carers, birth families and all professionals involved in care planning and service delivery for looked after children.
- Ensuring that safe care is practised within every foster family in order that children are protected from abuse and harm and foster carers are protected from allegations.
- Promoting the child's educational and social opportunities and achievements.
- Promoting the child's holistic health and physical needs.
- Ensuring that, where appropriate, children can exercise choice regarding their foster placement and are fully involved and consulted on matters regarding their care.
- Providing children and young people with written information about foster care and the Fostering Service.
- Ensuring ongoing support for carers through the provision of an allocated supervising social worker and appropriate resources. This will form part of the support for children and young people and their parents throughout the child's time in care.
- Promoting contact where this is in the child's best interests, with birth families and significant others.
- Placing siblings together as far as this is practically possible and consistent with their individual needs.
- Promoting the use of kinship care, where it is safe and appropriate to do so, for children and young people who cannot live with their birth parents.
- Providing young people with a suitable foster care placement in which they can develop the necessary skills and knowledge in preparation for independent living and, with the support of Leaving Care workers where eligible, make a successful transition to adulthood.
- Ensuring that arrangements made under the Private Fostering Regulations 2005 provide appropriate care for the child which promotes and safeguards their welfare.
- Through formal feedback and consultation, involving children, young people and foster carers in service developments.
- Ensuring appropriate records and management information are kept in relation to individual foster carers, children and young people and Fostering Service.
- Continually monitoring the service to ensure that high standards of care are achieved and that legal responsibilities are discharged appropriately.
- Maintaining a working relationship with foster carers based on mutual trust and respect. This relationship will be based on the principles described in the

Wiltshire Foster Carers' Charter.

- Raising the public profile of Wiltshire's Fostering Service.
- Fully supporting the function of corporate parenting in achieving best outcomes for looked after children in line with Wiltshire Council's objectives.

5. Management structure

The Fostering Service is located within Children's Services of Wiltshire Council. Responsibility for the overall management and strategic direction of the Fostering Service is exercised through the appropriate Head of Service. The post holder is directly accountable to the Associate Director with responsibility for Children's Services.

All the social workers employed within the Fostering Service hold a qualification in social work (CQSW /DipSW /SW Degree) and are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council. The Fostering Service also employs fostering support workers to provide additional support to foster carers. These workers all have relevant experience within the childcare field and in most cases an alternative relevant qualification.

Fostering staff are regularly supervised and appraised to ensure ongoing professional development.

All Wiltshire foster carers are allocated to a supervising social worker who visits the foster placement within the statutory requirements, including completing unannounced visits as required.

Each looked after child or young person will have a qualified social worker from one of the Wiltshire childcare teams allocated to them.

6. Services provided

The Fostering Service provides a variety of placement types to ensure that the individual needs of a child or young person are met appropriately. A thorough assessment of the child or young person's individual needs, provided by their allocated social worker, enables the Fostering Service to choose the right placement for them.

6.1 Short Breaks Care

Family Link

Family Link offers children with disabilities the opportunity to have short, planned regular breaks with a Family Link carer. The service is for children and young people living in Wiltshire aged between 0-18 who meet the criteria for support from the children with disabilities teams. The children and young people may have a significant learning and/or physical disability, a sensory loss or a severe chronic medical condition.

Family Link carers are carefully matched with a specific child or young person and their family after gradual introductions.

SEND Specialist carers (Contract Care)

This is a service which aims to provide care for children with significant disabilities and additional needs, on a more frequent basis than Family Link. The carers in this service are full time carers who it is envisaged will have several children coming into their care.

6.2 Short term fostering

Respite Care

These placements are used mainly to support families by providing regular, brief breaks, to enable them to continue as the primary carers for the child. They are also used to support the main fostering placement.

Short Term Fostering

Foster carers look after a child or young person for an agreed period of time whilst plans and arrangements are made with the birth family to resolve the difficulties which resulted in the child coming into care, or arrangements are made for the child or young person's long term permanent care.

Some children and young people will return home to their family or members of their extended family whilst others may move to long term fostering arrangements or become adopted.

6.3 Long term fostering

For some children who cannot return to their family, particularly older children who

maintain close and significant relationships with birth families, long term fostering

may be a more appropriate placement choice than adoption. Designed to provide permanence for a child, in these cases a suitable foster carer who has been approved as a long term foster carer will be identified as a suitable match for the child or young person. This match will be agreed at Foster Panel and by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

Existing short term foster carers who already know the child, or who have expressed an interest in caring for a child long term, could be approved as long term carers if appropriate and following a change in their approval details. This change would be agreed at Foster Panel and by the ADM.

6.4 Connected person (Family and friends) care

Wiltshire Fostering Service believes that being looked after by a relative or family friend can produce better outcomes for a child or young person. Where it is safe and appropriate, the service encourages the placement of children with relatives or family friends who are familiar with the child or young person as an alternative to being looked after by carers who are not known to the child or young person.

The Fostering Service assesses and provides support and training to family and friends carers to enable them to provide appropriate care for the child or young person where they are in care to the local authority. These placements may be a short term or long term option for a child or young person depending on the individual needs assessment and are dependent upon the legal status of the child.

6.5 Parent and child foster care placements

This is a developing service in co-operation with the special assessment team. This will provide court direct Parent and Child assessment places. It is in development and is expected to be functional by autumn 2017.

6.6 Supported Lodgings

. The service provides care to young people over 16 who are working towards independence, requiring to live in a family home but not necessarily an approved foster carer.

6.7 Private fostering

The Fostering Service will assess and monitor the suitability of private fostering arrangements made for a child by their parents according to statutory requirements. Private foster carers will be offered advice, training and support by the Fostering Service. The fostering service is also responsible for continuing to raise professional and public awareness and understanding of the need for private fostering arrangements to be notified to the social care service.

The designated private fostering social worker promotes public and professional awareness of the notification requirements for private fostering arrangements and

undertakes assessments of private fostering arrangements.

7. Procedures and processes for recruiting, approving, and training, supporting and reviewing foster carers

Recruitment, assessment and approval

The Fostering Service has a dedicated team for the recruitment and assessment of potential foster carers and a designated worker for the assessment, monitoring and support of private fostering arrangements. The workers within this team follow detailed guidance on the recruitment, assessment and approval of foster carers. The process follows the requirements and timescales of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, Fostering National Minimum Standards and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 and National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering.

The social workers in the Recruitment Team use a variety of strategies for encouraging members of the public to consider becoming foster carers; this includes the use of all forms of media for advertising and the provision of information. Fostering information sessions are held regularly at venues across the county and include opportunities for members of the public to speak to experienced foster carers.

Initial enquiries from members of the public who are interested in becoming foster carers are passed to the fostering team duty service and enquirers are screened by the duty social worker who asks basic questions, including details of their family, their motivation to foster and their accommodation space.

Enquirers are sent an information pack and where appropriate, are offered a visit to their home by a Recruitment social worker who gives more information and completes an initial assessment of the prospective foster carers.

If the prospective foster carers wish to proceed and are deemed suitable, they will be invited to attend the next available preparation course. Wiltshire offers the Fostering Network "Skills to Foster" course as its basic preparation.

After the preparation course the prospective foster carers will be invited to complete a formal application and will be allocated a fostering recruitment social worker to undertake the Home Study Assessment.

This thorough and comprehensive assessment will provide information about the prospective carer and their family to ensure the prospective carers' suitability to foster, and their ability to provide a safe, secure, warm and supportive environment which complies with the Fostering Service National Minimum Standards and in which fostered children can develop in all aspects of their lives. It will also include the type of placements the carer and the assessor believe will work best and will identify the strengths and limitations of the carer.

The assessment and approval process includes:

- The completion of a competence based assessment of the applicants, indicating their strengths and experiences and any deficits that may affect their ability to foster.
- A consideration of the impact of fostering on any other children living in the household.
- Where applicable, interviews with former partners where parenting has been shared.
- Statutory and good practice checks, including with the Disclosure and Barring Service, for all persons aged 18 and over in the household.
- Interviews with at least two personal referees.
- A full medical examination with the applicants' GP.
- The completed assessment is taken to the Foster Panel which will consider the report, supporting material and the recommended details of approval. The applicants are invited to attend and the assessing fostering social worker presents the case.
- Subject to the Foster Panel recommending approval, the Agency Decision Maker will make the final decision regarding approval. The applicants are notified verbally and in writing of their approval terms.
- Before any children are placed, the carers will enter into a foster carers' agreement with the department.

The Foster Panel

The Wiltshire Council Foster Panel considers the approval of prospective foster carers and the continuing suitability of currently approved foster carers via the annual review process. It also considers any terminations of approval, the outcome of any significant complaints or allegations made against foster carers and the long term match placements of children in care.

The panel is independently chaired and includes elected members and independent members. The panel membership complies with the requirements set out by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. An officer of the Council acts as Agency Advisor and the panel has access to specialist health and legal advice as required.

The Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who will make the final decision on whether or not to accept the recommendation.

Annual reviews

The Fostering Service Regulations 2011 require that foster carer's have an annual review. This review reflects upon the preceding year's fostering and considers the continued suitability of the carer to foster and the ongoing suitability of the terms of approval. Additional reviews can be called at any time if there is a change in circumstances or any issues of concern arises. All reviews are chaired by

a professional who is not the carer's allocated supervising social worker.

The reviewing fostering social worker will consult with the carer/s, carers' own children, any foster children and young people in placement and social workers who have children currently in placement or who have been in placement since the last review to inform the review process.

The annual review process will include:

- The supervising social worker ensuring that there is an updated Health and Safety checklist and Safer Caring Policy in place.
- Ensuring all DBS checks have been completed and are up to date for all members of the household over 18 years of age.
- Ensuring the foster carers have received regular supervision visits including a minimum of one unannounced visit a year.
- Ensuring all parties have been consulted and their views gathered in preparation for the review to assist in making a recommendation.
- Ensuring any concerns, complaints or allegations are taken into consideration in their recommendation regarding the carers continuing suitability.
- Making recommendations about any changes needed to the carer's approval terms.
- Identifying any training and support needs the carer may have and how these might be met.
- Making a recommendation about the carers' continuing suitability to foster.

All first annual reviews are presented to the Foster Panel regardless of the recommendation. The review is presented by the supervising social worker and the carers may attend if they want to. Subsequently, a carer's annual review will be presented to panel on a three yearly cycle.

Termination of approval

If a carer decides to give up fostering for Wiltshire Council then their approval will be automatically ceased 28 days following receipt by Wiltshire Fostering Service of their written resignation. Their name will be removed from Wiltshire's register of foster carers and a brief report will be presented to fostering panel to note their resignation.

If a carer is considered to be no longer suitable to foster either via the review process or due to an incident which causes serious concerns, the agency may terminate their approval. The Foster Panel will be notified and will consider the carer's de-registration and make a recommendation.

Where the Agency Decision Maker is in agreement with the panel's recommendation to de-register they will issue the carer a 'qualifying determination' of their intention to de-register them. Written representations can be made by the foster carer to the Fostering Service, if they do not agree with their approval being terminated, up to 28 days of the date of the qualifying determination. The foster carer has 28 days to appeal the decision to de-register either by asking for the matter to be reconsidered

by Wiltshire Foster Panel or by appealing to the IRM (Independent Review Mechanism). Details of how to appeal will be sent to the carer along with the 'qualifying determination'.

8. Support to foster carers

Supervision

Each foster carer has an allocated supervising social worker from the Fostering Service who is responsible for ensuring that safe care is practised within every foster placement in order that children are protected from abuse and harm. The allocated worker will provide the foster carer with the support, supervision and guidance they need to develop their skills and provide high level quality care to Wiltshire's looked after children and young people. The supervising social worker will visit at least monthly and more often if the need arises and will undertake a minimum of one unannounced visit a year. The supervising social worker will assist the foster carer to consider the child's needs in placement and work jointly with the child's social worker to ensure that the child's education, health, developmental, cultural, racial, and identity needs are met by the carer. The supervising social worker will make a record of supervision and the carer will be asked to sign it to indicate agreement with the contents.

Where there are two approved carers in a household and one is less available due to work commitments, the supervising social worker, in consultation with their manager, will agree an appropriate supervision pattern that ensures appropriate and proportionate contact with both carers.

Supervising social workers will work with the child's social worker and ensure that the carer is fully involved in the planning and decision making processes for the children and young people placed with them by facilitating constructive and participatory working relationships. This will include ensuring that the foster carer is provided with appropriate information regarding the child's needs and family background and understands their role and responsibilities within the placement plan, including what decision making authority has been delegated to them.

Training

The Wiltshire Fostering Service encourages all approved foster carers to attend a range of courses and workshops designed to enhance and develop their skills. All carers are required to complete the Core Fostering Training as required by Fostering Standards. Carers are also required to complete TDS standards within the first two years of approval, evidencing their learning and practice.

The Fostering Service has a dedicated training officer and there are clear training pathways developed for every arm of the service. Please see Appendix 3.

Foster carers receive a foster care handbook which details all relevant policies and guidance about requirements including care and control of children, record keeping, complaints, child protection procedures, safe care and health and safety.

Support groups

The Fostering Service runs various support groups for foster carers meeting monthly across Wiltshire which aim to meet identified local needs, provide a forum for discussion and opportunity to meet with staff from the Fostering Service. There is a specific support group for Family and Friends foster carers. Foster carers also have

their own group, the Wiltshire Fostering Association which meets regularly and liaises

with fostering managers. The group also meets quarterly with the fostering service manager and head of children in care service to discuss the performance and development of the service.

The Fostering Service hold a summer fun day and a Christmas party for foster carers and their children.

Support group for sons and daughters of foster carers

The Fostering Service runs a support group for sons and daughters of foster carers called Branches. This enables children to meet other children in a fostering family. The group provides a forum for children to discuss issues and concerns, provides support for children in their role within a fostering family and organise social activities and events.

Support from fostering support workers

Support workers supplement and enhance the work of the fostering social workers by providing additional support to the foster carers, their children and foster children. They also organise social events and assist in training for foster carers.

Children's guide to fostering

The Fostering Service provides every child entering a foster home with a guide which sets out the service they can expect to receive, including how to make a complaint and how to contact OFSTED.

Out-of-hours support line

The Fostering Service in Wiltshire provides an out-of-hours support line for its foster carers. This is a telephone consultation service, provided by Fostering Service staff, to give advice and guidance about urgent issues in placements.

Emergency Duty service (EDS) support

Wiltshire Council has a team of social workers available outside office hours to offer emergency social work support to all client groups. The service can offer telephone advice and support and has access to placement information and emergency fostering placements. In extreme circumstances, an EDS worker will visit to offer assistance and support to carers, and can advise on action to be taken, for example, in respect of children who are reported missing from placement.

Crisis intervention service (CIS)

This is a service, which acts as a supplementary resource between daytime fieldwork provision and EDS. The CIS workers are available to support foster carers in a crisis in the foster home or by working with the child in a neutral setting, to help de-escalate difficult situations and find solutions with the aim to return the child to the foster home as quickly as possible, where normal support can be resumed.

Fostering Network membership

The department automatically pays the annual subscription fees for all approved foster carers, from the time of their approval. There are a number of benefits to membership and these are set out in the foster care handbook.

Counselling support

A counselling service is available to foster carers who may have been profoundly affected by the fostering experience, e.g. death of a foster child. This is a bespoke service and carers can access this support via their social worker who will support them to identify and access the most appropriate avenue of support.

Independent support for foster carers subject to an allegation

Foster carers and their families who are subject to an allegation will be offered independent support provided by Fostering Network. The service provided includes information and advice, mediation, advocacy, emotional support and signposting. Supervising social workers can provide information about this.

Access to therapeutic support services

Therapeutic support is provided to foster carers to ensure they have the support they need to care for emotionally vulnerable and damaged children and young people. This is provided by two psychotherapists, who are contracted by Oxford Health to work with carers.

Recreational support

Wiltshire foster carers and their families can benefit from Wiltshire Council employee staff benefits. Discounts have been negotiated on goods and services from both local and national suppliers including house and home; hair and beauty discounts; entertainment; eating out; family deals; finance; travel deals; health and fitness; shopping; computers; motoring.

Foster carers and their families are also entitled to receive a free leisure centre family concession membership. Family membership covers two adults and all children within the family whether they are foster children or not.

Newsletter

The Fostering Service provides a newsletter for all foster carers which is distributed three times per year. This includes news and information about training opportunities, service developments and other relevant information regarding the Fostering Service. Feedback from foster carers are welcomed as feedback about the performance and development of the service.

Other support services

Foster carers can also get support from other services such as:

- The looked after children nurses regarding health issues for children.
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) provide advice and consultation regarding the mental health needs of children.
- The Virtual School service provides support and advice to ensure that looked after children are receiving the education provision they need.
- The independent visitor scheme provides a befriending service to looked after children and young people who have no contact or limited contact with their birth family.

9. **Complaints**

Wiltshire Council Fostering Service aims to provide the best possible service and recognises that children, their families and foster carers have the right to make a complaint if they are unhappy with any aspect of the service. There is a clear framework for responding to complaints and ensuring that looked after children and foster carers' views are heard.

It is the responsibility of the staff and managers within the Fostering Service to deal with the complaint in the first instance and attempt to reach a local resolution.

If the complaint cannot be resolved at the initial stage, the Childrens Services complaints procedure can be accessed.

If a child or young person makes a complaint about the service provided for them then the Children's Act complaints procedure must be followed. In this event the child or young person involved in the complaint will be entitled to an advocate to support and represent them in the process.

Advice on making a complaint can be sought from the Customer Complaints Manager who can be contacted at County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge BA14 8JN Tel: 01225 718446.

10. **Regulation**

Fostering services are regularly inspected by Ofsted. It's inspection reports are published on their internet site. Ofsted is responsible for the monitoring, regulating and inspecting of fostering services.

Contact details for Ofsted are as follows:

Local area office of Ofsted -

**Ofsted South Regional Centre
Freshford House
Redcliffe Way
Bristol
BS1 6NL**

The national office –

**Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD**