

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

FOSTERING

July 2010

Wiltshire Council
 Where everybody matters

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INTRODUCTION

This statement of purpose is a requirement of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering and the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. This statement is written to inform people about our service, what it does and how it works.

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

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

MISSION STATEMENT

Wiltshire's Fostering Service is committed to providing high quality standards of care to looked after children and young people in order to maximise their life chances and ensure that they have the opportunity to achieve each of the five Every Child Matters outcomes.

The Fostering Service aims to -

- provide a range of safe and secure foster placements to meet the assessed needs of children in care and to promote and safeguard their welfare.
- ensure that placements promote stability and positive outcomes for children and young people by working in partnership with young people, carers, birth families, other professionals involved in care planning and service delivery for looked after children and the community.
- fully develop the role of corporate parenting in achieving positive outcomes for looked after children in line with the council's objectives.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SERVICE

We aim to provide high quality care for children and young people in a family setting that reflects their individual needs and cultural values by:

- Thorough assessment of all carers based on their competencies and ability to meet the needs of looked after children, regardless of their race, class, age, marital status, sexual orientation or disability.
- Recruitment, assessment and support of prospective foster carers to develop a diverse range of foster carers who can provide safe and secure care to children with wide ranging needs.
- 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 recruitment campaigns to attract prospective foster carers and raise awareness of the needs of children and young people looked after by Wiltshire.
- Preparation training groups for potential foster carers to prepare them for the role of Wiltshire foster carers and to fulfil the full range of caring responsibilities.
- Providing foster carers with the supervision, support, training and written guidance they need to develop their skills and provide a high level of care to Wiltshire's looked after children and young people.
- Aiming to continue to increase the number of local foster placements to improve placement choice.
- Providing a foster placement that is assessed as being in the child's best interest by ensuring that children and young people are carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting their assessed needs and where the care given is most likely to promote their welfare and meet their individual needs.
- Ensuring that a child's religious, cultural and linguistic needs are properly understood and met in their foster placement.
- Ensuring stability and continuity in children and young people's lives so that their identity can be maintained and developed, their physical and mental wellbeing promoted and their full potential achieved.
- Ensuring that safe care is practised within every foster placement in order that children are protected from abuse and harm.

- Promoting the child's educational opportunities and achievements.
- Promoting the child's health and physical needs.
- Ensuring that 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.
- Providing a choice of foster placements which reflects the views and wishes of the child and parents.
- Ensuring ongoing support for carers, children and their parents throughout the child's time in care through the provision of an allocated worker and appropriate resources.
- Promoting contact where this is in the child's best interests, with birth families and significant others.
- Placing siblings together insofar as this is practically possible and consistent with their individual needs.
- Promoting the use of kinship care 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 for independent living and make a successful transition to adulthood.
- Ensuring that care arrangements made under the Private Fostering Regulations 2005 provide care for the child which promotes and safeguards their welfare.
- Working in partnership with all the professionals involved with the child to promote their welfare and meet their holistic needs.
- Involving children, young people and foster carers and building their feedback into service developments.
- To ensure appropriate records and management information are kept in relation to individual foster carers, children and young people and fostering services.
- Continually monitoring the service to ensure that high standards of care are achieved and that legal responsibilities are discharged appropriately.
- Raising the profile of Wiltshire's Fostering Service.

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's 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.
- 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 key 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.
- The Fostering Service will actively promote and support appropriate family contact.
- The Fostering Service will ensure that a young person's educational, health, emotional and social needs are properly met in order to promote their health and personal development and maximise education opportunity.
- 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/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 are 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 training support and information to foster carers to enable them to meet the individual needs of the the child or young person and to develop their skills as carers on an ongoing basis.

MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

The Fostering Service is located within the Department for Children and Education – Children in Care Service. Responsibility for the overall management and strategic direction of the Fostering Service is exercised through the Head of the Children in Care Service. The postholder is directly accountable to the Service Director, Social Care Branch.

The Fostering Service consists of two Fostering Teams following the Social Care restructuring in April 2010.

The Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team responsible for the recruitment and assessment of foster carers and the Fostering Supervision and Support team responsible for the ongoing support and supervision of foster carers.

Name	Designation
Carolyn Godfrey	Corporate Director, Department of Children and Education
Sharon Davies	Service Director, Social Care
Lin Hitchman	Head of Children in Care
Vacancy	Fostering Manager
Lynn Dunning	Assistant Team Manager-Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team
Elaine Ford	Assistant Team Manager-Fostering Supervision and Support Team
Lizzie Clark Chris Bonser Andrew Fleming Mary Wilford Jackie Peterson Trina Wichall Gertie Bernard Tracey Wellington Martin Zurian	Qualified Social Workers Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team

Miranda Morgan Joi Burrell Penny Sullivan Sandra Brooks Jackie Young Paula Hanrahan	Qualified Social Workers Fostering Supervision and Support Team
Steve Cladingboel Jennie Allen	Family Link Social workers
Annette Newman Fiona Cooper	Family Support Workers Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team
Debbie Caswell	Family Support Workers Fostering Supervision and Support Team

All the social workers employed within the Fostering Service hold a qualification in social work (CQSW/DipSW).

The Fostering Service also has unqualified 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 linked to a supervising social worker who visits the foster placement within the statutory requirements.

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

The five existing vacancies have been recruited to. Post holders should be in place by end September 2010.

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.

Thorough assessment of the child or young person's individual needs by their allocated social worker can help the Fostering Service to choose the right placement to meet their needs and in achieving stability for the child or young person.

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

Short term foster carers look after a child or young person for a period of time whilst arrangements are made with the birth family regarding 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.

Long Term Fostering

For some children, particularly older children who maintain close and significant relationships with birth families, long term fostering may be a more appropriate placement choice than adoption. In these cases, existing foster carers could be approved as long term carers if appropriate.

Kinship/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. 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 kinship carers to enable them to provide appropriate care for the child or young person. These placements may be a short term or long term option for a child or young person depending the individual needs assessment.

Private Fostering

The Fostering Service will assess and monitor the suitability of private fostering arrangements made for a child by their parents as per statutory requirements. Private foster carers will be offered 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.

Specialist Schemes

Family Link(Short Breaks)

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.

Bail and Remand Scheme

This is a specialist scheme that is run in partnership with the Youth Offending Service to provide fostering placements for young people who are either on bail or remanded to the care of the local authority by the court.

Specialist Scheme

Placements are provided for young people with challenging behaviour, often teenagers who may have additional complex needs and/or offending behaviour.

External Placements

The Fostering Service also undertake placement finding with external providers of fostering resources. They scrutinise the information provided and work with the child's social worker prior to placements to ensure an appropriate match is made.

FOSTERING RESOURCES

Payment for Skills Scheme

Wiltshire has developed a payment scheme, which is linked to the skills and experience of the carers. This is evidenced and entry to the fee payment scheme as to be supported by their supervising social worker.

Level One

Level One foster carers receive the basic fostering allowance for the age of the child placed. This is agreed annually and is usually the Fostering Network's recommended rate.

Level Two

Level Two foster carers receive the basic allowance plus an extra fee for each child. This is assessed according to the foster carer's skills, as supported by the supervising officer and manager.

Level Three

Level Three foster carers receive the basic allowance plus an extra fee for each child. This is assessed according to the carer's skills and commitment to the service, as supported by the supervising officer and the manager. This is higher fee than Level Two.

Level Four

Level Four foster carers receive the basic allowance plus an extra fee for each child, again assessed according to the carer's skills and commitment to the service, as supported by the supervising officer and the manager. This fee is higher than Level Two or Three.

This scheme is due to be reviewed, in line with the requirements of the Training, Support & Development Standards for Foster Carers.

Future Developments

During the next year, the Fostering Service will continue to review the services provided including the cohort of carers to ensure that the needs of Wiltshire's looked after children are met.

Procedures and processes for Recruiting, Approving, Training, Supporting and Reviewing Foster Carers

Recruitment and Approval

The Fostering Service has a dedicated team for the recruitment and assessment of potential foster carers following the Social Care restructuring in April 2010. The workers within this team have detailed guidance on the recruitment, assessment and approval of foster carers. The process follows the requirements and timescales of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Fostering National Minimum Standards.

There are currently 21 assessments of all types of foster carers in progress.

The Recruitment fostering social workers use a variety of strategies for encouraging members of the public to consider fostering, including the use of the media and the Wiltshire Council website.

Initial enquiries 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 then, where appropriate, are followed up by a visit to their home by a Fostering 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, "Skills to Foster".

After the preparation course the prospective foster carers will be invited to complete a formal application and will be allocated a Fostering social worker to undertake the **Home Study Assessment (using BAAF Form F)**. This assessment will provide information about the prospective carer and their family. It will also include the type of placements the carer and the assessor believe will work best with, alongside the strengths and limitations of the carer.

- Routine checks, including with the Criminal Records Bureau, will be taken up and at least two personal referees will be interviewed.
- The applicants will be asked to arrange to have a full medical examination, for long-term placements or for a medical reference from their GP, if offering short-term or respite.

- The completed social work assessment part of the Form F is shared with the applicants, they are asked to sign it and are given a copy.
- The completed assessment is taken to the Fostering Panel for the Panel to consider the 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 in writing of their approval terms.
- Before any children are placed, the carers will enter into a Foster Care Agreement with the Department.

The Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel considers the approval of prospective foster carers and annual reviews of both current short term and long term foster carers. It also considers any terminations of approval.

The Panel includes elected members and independent members. The Panel membership complies with the requirements set out by the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and is chaired by an independent chair to ensure an objective view of the fostering process.

The Panel makes recommendations to the Service Director Social Care as the designated agency decision maker who will make the final decision on whether or not to accept the recommendation.

Annual Reviews

The Foster Placement regulations require that foster carer's approval is reviewed annually. This review considers the continued suitability of the carer to foster. 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 social workers who have children currently in placement or who have been in placement since the last review.

The Annual Review process will include:

- The reviewing fostering social worker ensuring that there is an updated Health & Safety Checklist and Safer Caring Policy, together with any End of Placement reports.

- Making recommendations about any changes needed to the carer's approval terms and any training and support needs.
- A copy of the report of the first annual review being presented to the Fostering Panel.

The Fostering Panel will look at a random audit of foster carers' reviews, as a Quality Assurance measure and any subsequent reviews where there are significant issues involved.

Termination of approval

If a carer decides to give up fostering for Wiltshire then their approval will be terminated and their name removed from Wiltshire's Register of Foster Carers.

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 Fostering Panel will be notified and will consider the carer's de-registration. 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 decision. The foster carer also has 28 days to appeal the decision to deregister.

Support to foster carers

Supervision

Each foster carer has an allocated social worker from the Fostering Service who provides support, supervision and guidance to the carer. The supervising social worker will visit at least monthly and more often if the need arises. 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.

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.

Training

Wiltshire Fostering Service encourages all approved foster carers to attend a range of courses and workshops designed to enhance and develop their skills. Training is provided in-house by the Fostering Service, through the Staff Development Team or through courses provided by external training agencies. Carers training needs are usually identified during home visits and at their annual review and

training opportunities will be offered to support foster carers to complete the Children's Workforce Development Council's Training, Support and Development standards for Foster Carers.

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 SERVICES

Support Groups

The fostering service runs various support groups for foster carers meeting monthly across Wiltshire which aims to meet identified local needs. 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 Head of Children in Care Service.

Support from fostering support workers

Support workers supplement and enhance the work of the fostering social workers by providing practical input, supervision and support to the foster carers, their children and foster children. They also assist with running social events and 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-fuse difficult situations. The aim is 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 and Advocacy Support

A counselling and advocacy support service is available to foster carers who have been profoundly affected by the fostering experience, e.g. death of a foster child.

Recreational Support

Facilities are available for Wiltshire foster carers and their families to benefit from concessions at their local sports, recreation and leisure facilities.

Social Events

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

Newsletter

The Fostering Service provide a newsletter for all foster carers which is distributed three times per year. This includes information about training opportunities and other relevant information regarding the Fostering Service.

Other support services

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

- Children's Rights Officer who can ensure that children and young people are involved in decisions about their future.
- 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 provide 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.
- Connexions Service provides information and advice regarding accessing personal development opportunities and aims to help young people to engage in learning to make a smooth transition to adulthood.

NUMBERS OF CARERS

As at July 2010 Wiltshire Council has 197 foster carer households.

NUMBERS OF CHILDREN PLACED

As at July 2010 Wiltshire Council has 198 children placed in foster placements with Wiltshire carers.

COMPLAINTS

The Department of Children and Education 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 can not be resolved at the initial stage the Department's 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 Complaints Officer at Wiltshire Council who can be contacted on Tel: 01225 713678.

Since January 2010 there have been 2 complaints both of which were resolved at Stage one of the complaints process.

REGULATION

Fostering Services are regularly inspected by Ofsted, with inspection reports 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 -

**OfstedSouth Regional Centre
Freshford House
Redcliffe Way
Bristol
BS1 6NL**

The national office –

**Ofsted National Business Unit
Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA**